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AUSTRALIAN Shooter

THE MAGAZINE FOR SPORTING SHOOTERS

SPORTING CHANCE

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FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Baikal's rimfire

QUIRKS WORK

for Browning's
bold venture



Culling dilemma - a question of education

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Our April cover - see page 16

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Ben Unten has been out and about with the new Akkar 3 triple-barrel shotgun and used it to make quick work of a couple of chook-hunting foxes which had been stalking his paddock.

Sam Garro has put the spotlight on Bill 'The Tanner' from Melbourne who has turned his passion for hunting and tanning pelts into a business which keeps him busy all year round.

How expensive, heavy and complicated do you want your riflescope to be? Next month, Dave Pearce weighs in with an article on how to find the right scope for your individual needs.



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MEMBERSHIP AND MAGAZINE INQUIRIES

Phone: 02 8805 3900

Fax: 02 9832 9377

PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

Email: mem@ssaa.org.au

EDITORIAL POLICY

To create a better environment and community understanding of all forms of hunting and shooting sports.

EDITORIAL INQUIRIES

Phone: 08 8272 7100

Fax: 08 8272 2945

PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

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EDITORIAL

MANAGING EDITOR.....Allan Blane

ASSOCIATE EDITOR.....Thomas Cook

ASSISTANT EDITOR.....Dave Rose

CHIEF OF STAFF.....Jennifer Martens

ART DIRECTOR.....Mike Barr

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR

& GRAPHIC DESIGNER.....Elizabeth Tyson

GRAPHIC DESIGNER.....Natalie Kuhlmann

MEDIA & POLITICAL LIAISON OFFICER.....Nadia Isa

WEBMASTER.....Mark Fieldhouse

ADVERTISING & PROMOTIONS.....Karin Wasiak

COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER.....Sam Talbot

ADMINISTRATION.....Debbie Wing

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT.....John Dunn

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT.....Rod Pascoe

CONTRIBUTORS THIS ISSUE

Peter Bindon, Russell Mark, John McDougall, David Alderson, John Maxwell, Jeremiah, Kim Atkinson, Lionel Swift, Mike Smith, Mark van den Boogaart, Anthony Tammatt, Dick Eussen, Con Kapralos, Paul Miller, Sam Garro, Chris Redlich, Daniel O'Dea.

STATE CONTACT INFORMATION

For SSAA inquiries please contact your state SSAA office:

NSW 02 8889 0400 **WA** 08 9497 7919

Qld 07 3281 3447 **SA** 0419 849 452

Vic 03 8892 2777 **ACT** 0423 043 663

Tas 0418 734 008 **NT** 0402 013 918

NATIONAL CONTACT INFORMATION

SSAA National Chief Executive Officer

and Chief Editor Tim Bannister

Wildlife Programs Matthew Godson

PO Box 2520, Unley, SA 5061

Phone: 08 8272 7100

SSAA National Accounts Office

PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

Phone: 02 8805 3900

Email: accounts@ssaa.org.au

SSAA General Insurance Brokers

Unit 1, 212 Glen Osmond Rd,

Fullarton, SA 5063

Phone: 08 8332 0281

Free call: 1800 808 608

Fax: 08 8332 0303

Email: insurance@ssaaains.com.au

Please mail all correspondence for the

SSAA National Executive to SSAA,

PO Box 282, Plumpton, NSW 2761

Email: ssaa@ssaa.org.au



President's Message

WITH GEOFF JONES

Keeping abreast of developments in testing times

How much can change in such a short period. While the after-effects will be felt for a long time to come, the bushfires have been managed and those regions, together with many of our worst drought-affected areas, have enjoyed long-awaited rainfall which will again alter the dynamics of the Australian landscape economically, socially and environmentally.

The big plus for our hunters will be a resurgence of game animals and pest species which need to be managed. Our ranges should share in part of this revival through members testing new equipment, sighting-in and practising their skills to achieve the best possible results from their hunting efforts.

Along with the environmental uplift, a commonsense decision was finally made to declare a bird season in Victoria after a tokenistic delay and rearranging of the deckchairs to appease the green emotion where there was no science to support their wafer-thin argument. I wish all Victorian bird hunters well in their campaign.

On the competitive scene the strong stance by a number of countries led by India has belatedly seen the inclusion of shooting as part of the 2022 Commonwealth Games although in a less than ideal manner. For those involved in this arena there will need to be a strong and ongoing effort to ensure competitive shooting does not become a casualty of Commonwealth Games political correctness in the future. Despite this distraction Australia currently has many top-class shooters vying for places in the upcoming Olympics and I'm confident we'll all give these contenders every support leading up to and during the Games.

There is some movement on the legislation front through our constant lobbying efforts including a permanent national firearms amnesty much closer with final details to be thrashed out. Not surprisingly factual ignorance, parochial state agendas and sheer bloody mindedness seem to be the main stumbling blocks in achieving a timely and workable process but there is

light at the end of the tunnel. My recent meetings at Federal Government level indicate a willingness to talk and listen but of course most firearms legislation is made and administered at State level so continual lobbying there is essential.

I also detected a belated but subtle acknowledgement that the original NFA was hastily and in several areas ill-conceived and the 2017 NFA review was little more than window dressing and is well dated. Of course, we need to remember this can be viewed from two perspectives but with factual research and organisational integrity there is the possibility of sensible change in future.

The threat of the COVID-19 virus rightly or wrongly has impacted on every part of society and what we do. Unfortunately this has meant the SSAA had to take appropriate measures to protect our members, resulting in postponement of the NSW Shot Expo and overseas travel for our competitive shooting teams.

As this is a rapidly moving feast, we'll try our best to keep members up to date as much as we can through our various websites, Facebook pages, e-Newsletters and e-Alerts. SSAA will make every responsible and reasonable effort to keep our members and staff informed and protected, so please bear with us if there's any personal inconvenience.

For those of us who are hunters as well and enjoy the bird and deer hunting (rut) seasons, we generally don't come into contact with large crowds of people but take this opportunity to become part of this great natural environment in the purest sense. For the next month or two I'll be with you doing what comes naturally and we might even bump into each other around the ridges.

G. E. Jones

Geoff Jones
SSAA National President



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SSAA Shot Expo postponed as virus interrupts

THE SSAA SHOT Expo in Sydney has been postponed amid ongoing concerns of COVID-19 (Coronavirus). The Expo was scheduled for June this year but the Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia has decided to postpone the event after government advice surrounding 'non-essential' gatherings of more than 500 people.

The two-day Expo at Rosehill Gardens Racecourse in Sydney is one of the Association's flagship events for the year and would have attracted thousands of sports shooting fans. SSAA's NSW Board and Chief Executive Officer had been

meeting regularly with SSAA National and Expo promoter Level Up Events. SSAA did not take the postponement decision lightly, with the Association closely monitoring events relating to COVID-19.

"The matter will be kept under constant review and any changes announced via the SSAA National website and by email to our National Discipline Chairmen," said SSAA (NSW) Chief Executive Officer Jai Rowell. "We regret having to take this action but the health and wellbeing of our members must remain our first priority."

At all times the Association has focused on

the safety of members, volunteers, staff, exhibitors and the general public. "Our priority is safety and we do not feel we can proceed with the Expo in the current climate," said SSAA National President Geoff Jones.

The Shot Expo was scheduled for the weekend of June 20-21 and a new date has not yet been decided. The Benchrest Centrefire National Championships scheduled to take place in Canberra at Easter have also been postponed with no new date set.

Letters

WRITE TO PO BOX 2520, UNLEY, SA 5061 OR EMAIL EDIT@SSAA.ORG.AU

Drought hitting farmers hard

Thank you for another great magazine - lately the diversity of information has been relevant and refreshing. I'd like to comment on 'The unforgiving beast' by Dave Burgess (*Shooter*, December 2019). A thoughtful article and something very pertinent to primary producers nowadays, particularly how farmers feel in the current political climate and government inaction.

However, one caption quotes the price of hay at \$150 a ton. Even the cheapest feed right now is around \$300 a ton in Queensland and this has to be supplemented with other feed. If you have stock you don't want to go downhill you have to pay \$500-\$600 a ton, as we do.

Truck costs alone are \$4.50 to \$5.50 a kilometre with hay coming from NSW or Victoria to southern Queensland. I mention this as I feel many people don't actually know how many thousands of dollars the average farmer spends keeping stock alive in drought.

Dave mentions encouraging city hunters to help farmers in some way which is very thoughtful. Yet perusing internet hunting forums and podcasts we see too many hunters still believe farmers should reimburse city shooters for ammo and fuel they use when culling feral animals. This feeling is out there far more than some think and

is a real reason for the increasing divide between urban hunters and farmers.

Anyway, thanks again for the diversity of articles lately - it helps bring us together which is the number one aim in my view.

Grant Walterfang, Qld

A question of integrity

On re-reading your November magazine I came to the letter "Is honesty the best policy?" relating to the need for the writer to inform a state authority as to the presence of firearms at their address. After reading the letter I share the writer's concerns and believe the issue of confidentiality with regard to possession of firearms is a serious matter and one which we should pursue.

Clearly I don't know how many authorities in the various states and territories have this requirement, but as the writer points out it is quite illogical, as any issue with a firearm will almost certainly come from an illegal owner who will, in any case, have answered 'no'.

Another issue which comes to mind is 'what will authorities do with the information?' Will they refuse to have their personnel visit the address or send someone accompanied by an armed guard?

I believe this is a serious matter which should be taken up with the relevant

authorities with a view to having this requirement deleted for the safety and integrity of our members.

Philip Roberts, via email

Too much 'freedom' of information

I read with great concern the letter on the new development in political correctness regarding anti-gun rubbish - 'Is honesty the best policy?' (*Shooter*, November 2019). On my firearms licence it stipulates the only person who can ask to see my licence is a police officer as they're the only people with access to the police/firearms registry information and their inquiry into my information is logged.

On that basis no other government department/body has the right to ask for that information and we could be found negligent for supplying it to people not qualified to ask for it. Maybe we should be asking the department for their Safe Work Method statement to see how they handle this new dangerous situation and the very sensitive information.

I live on a farm and am licensed to store and use any number of dangerous substances/tools etc and no government department has ever asked for information before visiting.

Graham Annovazzi, NSW

Duck hunters won't be packing their bags this year

On review of duck and quail season announcements in both Victoria and South Australia, it becomes clear that politics is starting to trump the principles of sustainable use and science, with failure to understand simple things such as the low risk regulated hunting presents to game bird populations which are widespread and nomadic.

Waterfowl populations should be thought about on the continental scale and acknowledgement given that birds fly between regions in response to drought and floods. Drawing a handful of transect lines across a few states only provides a trend more relevant to those habitat areas than wider waterfowl populations, especially when the areas represent less than 1 per cent of what waterfowl populations actually use.

South Australia's duck and quail season announcement was full of disappointments, the biggest being no declaration of a quail season at all. The stakeholder panel which provides recommendations to the department had few concerns regarding sustainability of quail hunting apart from Birds SA's current objection to it. Over the past two years I've provided reports to panel members and the department which included an estimate of a sustainable harvest limit and risk assessment.

To summarise those reports, using stubble quail population density estimates

and the area of quail habitat, I arrived at an estimated population size in SA then calculated a scaled-back estimate (1 per cent of the original figure) to be conservative. I estimated the statewide population to be 1,114,443 stubble quail and setting a sustainable harvest level of 20 per cent would suggest an allowable harvest of 222,888 birds. From past bag surveys, hunters are taking less than 10,000 stubble quail out of SA, or around 4 per cent of the sustainable harvest limit. Nothing to see here - move on!

My risk assessment pointed out that available habitat for stubble quail in SA is almost 62 million hectares and of that area 16 per cent was privately held properties where dry-land cropping, irrigated pastures and modified grazing pastures are found. It's a fair assumption to make that less than 1 per cent of these privately held properties undergo any hunting pressure. Again, nothing to see.

Whoever made the stupid decision not to declare a quail season certainly hasn't made up for it by offering a better duck season. There have been restrictions on certain game reserves without consultation with hunting groups and daily start and finish times have been changed to sunrise and sunset, again without consulting hunting groups. The word out there is some bozo birdwatcher got in the minister's ear and claimed it's hard to identify waterbirds before sunrise and after sunset.

Sure, some waterbirds perhaps, but definitely not ducks.

Another stupid SA restriction is not just the bag limit of four ducks and a reduced season, but you can only take one mountain duck and one pink-eared duck as part of your bag. With a ridiculously low limit of four, these species restrictions make no sense when the most abundant species (blackies and teal) will probably fill your bag before you see one of the less abundant species.

Victoria's hunters have been treated even more harshly and have plenty of reasons to feel cheated with unprecedented delays in announcing the season and, when the announcement finally came, the only positive was that there actually *was* a season - a five-week window with a three-duck bag limit. Many will simply say: "Why bother?"

David Laird of SSAA (Vic) says the "constant assault on hunters and hunting by the 'anti' brigade has not been successful in denying hunters their cultural heritage but SSAA members will be rightly disappointed with the arrangements put in place". I completely agree and we must work hard to change processes which allow politics to trump the principles of sustainable use and science.

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OUR COMMUNICATIONS

OFFICER Sam Talbot is a lucky man, being one of the first people in Australia to lay his hands on the all-new S20 rifle by Sako. Described by the manufacturer as a 'future-proof' bolt action rifle, the S20 was unveiled by Beretta Australia at their 20th anniversary dealers' day last month.

The rifle has been designed to cater to active shooters who want to be in control of any given situation and is a true hybrid which will be ideal for both hunting and precision shooting and on its official release next month will be available in eight different calibres.

Said Sam: "This is a super-accurate rifle which was an absolute pleasure to shoot - even I managed to hit the target every time! I have no doubt the S20 will be very popular with Australian hunters and target shooters alike."

An in-depth review of the Sako S20 is coming soon in *Australian Shooter*.



Insurance Q&A with Trevor Jenkin

Send questions to: communications@ssaa.org.au

Q Can you offer me a good deal on my insurances as I've been a SSAA member for a number of years now?

Robert, via email

A We can certainly give you a quote and information to help you make a decision on your insurances. 'Insurances' means all general cover from home and contents to motor, boat, business, trade and retail shop insurance.

Best time to source a quote is three to four weeks prior to the expiry of your existing policy. There's quite a bit of

underwriting information needed to provide you with a quote, so once we hear from you we'll either forward you the appropriate forms to complete or you can speak to one of our brokers on the phone or in person.

We then forward this information to insurance companies for their quotes. Once we receive those we forward you the most competitive along with a copy of their policy wording and any supporting documents. Due to compliance we must supply you with these documents so are unable to provide you with quotes over the phone. It's important to get in before your

insurance expiry date as it's likely your current insurer will have arranged cover for the next 12 months.

The 'good deal' we provide is excellent service and a competitive premium. More members insuring through SSAA General Insurance Brokers means we can pay a bigger dividend back to SSAA each year which the Association can use to promote and develop our sport. If you'd like information or a quote on any of your insurances, call the brokerage on (08) 8332 0281.

The advice offered in this column is of a general nature and does not allow for individual situations. SSAAIB recommends that you obtain professional advice before proceeding with any insurance investment. SSAAIB accepts no liability for any actions by an individual to change their insurance plans without seeking professional advice.



More than a flash in the pan

It seemed inappropriate for a while but since the fires that ravaged some of our best hunting country were replaced by flooding rains, I'd like to offer my views on a fire-lighting topic. There has been some discussion on the most appropriate fire-lighting technique which should be carried as a back-up to your primary fire-lighting method, usually a Bic lighter or waterproof matches.

In my view - and this has been my opinion for many years - a ferrocerium rod, which is practically indestructible and will produce hot sparks in almost any weather conditions, cannot be beaten as a back-up system. From my earliest days camping on rabbit hunts, my mates and I carried the then equivalent of a ferrocerium rod. I'm not sure whose idea it first was but we all had one.

At that time smoking was a much more common activity and cigarette lighters of many kinds were used, the little flints in these lighters producing sparks when a rough wheel was rotated by the smoker's thumb. The shower of sparks ignited a cotton wick soaked in 'lighter fluid' and the flame then applied to whatever was being lit.

Eventually the flint wore down and was discarded when a new one was fitted. We saved the spent flints or sometimes cadged new ones from adults who had the dispenser that held a dozen new flints (a lifetime supply). Several used ones were all we needed and using epoxy glue, which had

just appeared on the market, fastened them into a groove laboriously worked into the handle of a camping toothbrush. Scraping a sharp blade down the row of flints produced a shower of sparks that would ignite tinder.

We quickly discovered the sparks were produced just ahead of the blade, so it was usually necessary to have the end of the row of flints either on the ground close to the tinder or even pushed into the tinder pile a little way so the sparks fell where they were needed. For us, the current argument about whether it's better to move the knife blade down the rod or pull the rod back against a static knife blade was not a question.

We invariably pulled the rod back from the knife blade which was positioned exactly where we wanted the sparks to fall. We soon learned it was better to have really crisp edges on the back of the blade so the cutting edge wasn't destroyed - ferrocerium is pretty tough stuff. Although I recently found one of my original toothbrush strikers, much larger and more efficient ones can be found and they too have a plastic handle and several are scattered through my bivouac gear.

This kind of rod, with striker in the form of a short length of hard steel attached, is common in outdoor shops and is inexpensive. They're often supplied, mostly without a striker, in a small holder built into the sheath of the kind of all-purpose or bushcraft knife you might wear on your belt while hunting. I often choose the rods



From left: Rod in metal support with attached striker, two bushcraft knives with rod in side pouch attached to sheath, 'toothbrush' rod made with lighter flints, rod inserted into one side of magnesium bar.

mounted on a magnesium bar as then I always have hot-burning tinder available that will even ignite wet twigs.

I've seen ferrocerium rods about a centimetre thick and 150mm long, overkill in my view but there's no doubt they're efficient. As warmth is one of the four necessities for human survival, and fire is the simplest source of warmth in the outdoors, consideration should be given to carrying at least one back-up fire-lighting method and my tip is a ferrocerium rod.



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QLD barry@bandaragencies.com.au | SA mjosephs@crkennedy.com.au

Clay Target Q&A

WITH RUSSELL MARK

Q I was delighted to see the Olympic Clay Target trials streamed 'live' on the internet recently, something I feel is a terrific move forward for our sport. I've never been much of a shotgun shooter but watching the trials really caught my interest. What amazed me was the great variety in body shapes of those competitors making the finals. To that end, is there an 'ideal' physique for a Trap or Skeet shooter?

Lance Johnson, Vic

A One of the most appealing aspects of our sport for many people is the fact there really are no physical barriers to entry. As long as you're tall enough and strong enough to lift a 4kg, 12-gauge shotgun to your shoulder then you're good to go. Obviously strength and endurance will help if you need to be at the top of your game over a nine-hour competition but, to be honest, for every physically fit Olympic shooting medallist I can name, I could tell you two who couldn't run a lap of their local footy field.

I'm certainly not suggesting obesity is a pre-requisite for success in clay target shooting, but neither is the ability to run a four-minute mile. I'm amazed at some of the people I've coached over the years who defy logic by being at the elite level of our sport while inhabiting some of the weirdest body shapes.

Hand to eye co-ordination in my opinion

is one of the greatest attributes for success, closely followed by a burning desire to win. If you're willing to persevere and learn how to extract knowledge from the days you lose, then I believe you can eventually go all the way in our sport.

Having said that, in a perfect world if you possess all the attributes I mention along with a reasonable level of fitness and strength, I think success will come more quickly and easily than it will to someone who isn't fit. It all comes down to the individual's desire and how much time and money they're willing to sacrifice to reach the top.

Q I'm keen to hear your opinion of shotguns with two sets of barrels. I have the option to buy a Browning 'D' Grade with a 30" Trap barrel and 26" Skeet barrel.

Albano Digichino, Vic

A In their day Browning 'D' Grades - or B2Gs as they were commonly known - were one of the most popular competition shotguns in the country, a good quantity of these Belgian-made firearms having found their way to Australia. Many were 'shot to death' but they seemed to be able to be magically retightened to appear and work as good as new.

If the shotgun you're looking at has been well cared for - and it's probably at least

40 years old - there's no reason to think it won't last another 40 years. But be careful if one barrel has been used on the mechanism of the firearm significantly more than the other, as you may find one of the barrels will appear far sloppier than the other.

My only other concern would be if the Trap stock is too high in the comb to shoot Skeet effectively. From experience and memory (I owned one also) the Trap stocks were not all that high, therefore shooting Skeet with it should not cause you too much grief. It's interesting how perceptions have changed though, as once upon a time 26" barrel Skeet guns were all the rage, now you'd be hard pressed to find one at 30" and even some 32" Skeet guns have taken over as the popular barrel of choice.



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Q Are you able to identify this large shell which turned up at our pistol club. The 12-gauge shot shell next to it is for size comparison. I could be wrong but I think they're used to blast a hole in a nickel furnaces to allow molten metal to flow out.

Mark Atkins, WA

A You have a Winchester 8-gauge industrial cartridge. The paper shotgun-like case holds a solid slug made from either lead or zinc of different shapes and weights depending on the application. Your example has a lead slug weighing around 3oz (85g).

The cartridges were fired in special guns which looked more like heavy machine guns but were in fact single-shot devices mounted on a heavy-duty stand. Sometimes called kiln guns or furnace guns, they were used in the mining, cement and steel industries to knock down overhangs in mines and quarries, break up stoppages in silos, dislodge rings or clinkers in blast furnaces and remove slag build-up in rotary kilns.

Prior to their invention in the 1930s, foundries had to cease operation and wait for furnaces to cool down before allowing workers to enter with picks and hammers to break up and remove the slag build-up. With these industrial cartridges and guns, a number of rounds can now be fired into the furnace while it's operating at normal temperatures, sometimes up to 2000°C.

Your suggestion they were used to 'blast a hole in a nickel furnace' is *almost* correct. In a process called 'tapping' a shot would be fired to dislodge a solidified plug of metal that formed a bung in the bottom of a cauldron of molten metal. When the bung was shot away, the molten contents would flow out.

There are some interesting YouTube videos showing these industrial guns in action. You'll also find some video of our US friends using the Remington Master-Blaster 'cement gun' for target practice at the range. Naturally they weren't designed for sporting purposes and had an effective range of only a few metres.

Rod Pascoe

Q I had my guns stolen years ago and since then have always wondered if it was an option to store the 'action' of a gun in a different location to the gun safe. I think this could be effective theft prevention as without the 'action' the gun is useless. Of course the firearm itself would always be stored in an approved gun safe.

Bruno, via email

A Firstly, you should be aware that each state has its own firearms legislation relating to storage, so the answer to your question may depend on where you live. You should consider raising this question with the firearms authority in your state to ensure which parts require secure storage.

As a generalisation, all states require firearms to be securely stored and this may include 'firearm parts'. What constitutes a firearm part also varies but it would be safe to say actions are 'securable' parts. I'm not sure which firearms you have but many have actions which are not easily removable (bolt-action, many lever action rifles, most double-barrelled shotguns as well as most handguns).

The danger associated with storing firearm parts separately from the firearm is they may become lost or perhaps incorrectly replaced. Bolts, for example, can be put back into the wrong rifle leading to headspace problems. While some state gun laws encourage storing bolts separately from rifles, many government agencies specifically forbid such a practice precisely because of accidents resulting from putting the wrong bolt in the wrong firearm.

A reasonably-made gun safe which is secured according to state law should prevent most thefts, but perhaps the best form of security is to not make public the fact you have firearms in the first place. Alarm systems and CCTV cameras are increasingly becoming the norm in some states.

Geoff Smith

Q I have a Remington Model 783 in .223 Rem with a synthetic stock and am contemplating an adjustable stock (GRS Berserk or similar) not out of necessity, but 'toys for the boys' as you might appreciate. My question is: Will the 783 model fit into the stock made for the Rem 700 on a 'drop-in' basis with no extra work needed?

Ray Price, Qld

A You've got me scratching my head on this one Ray. The action on the 783 is very different to the 700 series and uses a nut to attach the barrel to the action rather like the Savage 110 rifles. So the answer is a simple 'no' for dropping your 783 barrelled action into an aftermarket stock for a 700 Remington action with no extra work needed. GRS don't appear to make a stock for the 783 but a US firm called Boyds make a rather striking thumb-hole stock - check out their website at www.boydsgunstocks.com

I spoke with Alex from Raytrade in Melbourne who import Remington into Australia and he was most knowledgeable and helpful, confirming Raytrade don't import any aftermarket stocks for 783 or 700 actions. He told me the 783 is an economical rifle but one that can be surprisingly accurate and great for hunting. The 700 is their superior rifle as reflected in the price difference and in many ways 700 Remingtons are a benchmark in the rifle industry.

Get online if you can, check out Boyds and see if a Google search can find any other replacement stocks for your 783 as there's absolutely nothing wrong with a bit of 'toys for the boys' accessorising. I found a US-made HS Precision left-handed short action black composite stock for my Remington 700BDL .17 Rem online recently which had also been bedded and fitted my barrelled action like a glove. I've had the same silly smile on my face for two weeks now so I definitely get where you're coming from. Good luck with your search.

Paul Miller

Q Can you suggest a mount/ring/scope combination for the Ruger No.1-B in .223. Eye relief seems to be the issue with the original Ruger rings and base mount. I've tried Picatinny off-set Weaver rings with a fixed 6x40 and am looking at 2.5-8x40 or maybe fixed 6x power with long eye relief (125-150mm).

Darren Guazzelli, WA

A There are various ways the problems you're having can be addressed. Both Ruger and Leupold make offset rings and those are probably the best place to start so talk to your local gun dealer about their availability.

I spoke to Peter Canning at Elk's Hunting and Fishing in Albury about your problem and he recommended Ruger offset rings combined with a long eye relief variable such as 3-9x40 or a 6-18x40 VXII Leupold. He didn't think there was a fixed 6x scope available that would meet your needs.

Steve Hurt at Outer Edge Projectiles makes a replacement quarter rib for the No.1 Ruger that shifts the location of the scope back around 18.5mm using standard Ruger rings. I've had one of these on my No.1 in 7x57 for the past decade or so, fitted with a 1.5-6x42 Schmidt and Bender Zenith scope in standard Ruger mounts and it works extremely well. The cost of the quarter rib is around \$250 and Steve can also supply offset rings.

Finally, you might consider shortening the stock on your rifle, a drastic measure but one which has worked for a number of hunters I know.

John Dunn

Q I bought a Howa 1500 blued, walnut stock in .22/250, bedded the action and floated the barrel. I also had the springs replaced in the trigger to lighten the pull and although I don't like two-stage triggers this one isn't too bad. I've tried various loads with both Hornady 60gr soft points and 55gr V-Max using ADI 2206H powder, Winchester brass and Federal 210 primers with little success of less than 30mm at 100yds.

I doubt there's a problem with the rifle/scope combination (Vixen 4-16x44 in steel mounts) and was wondering if there was a specific powder or powder/projectile combination the 250 liked. Any suggestions appreciated and considered. Thanks for a fine column in a great magazine.

Ian Cameron, via email

A To begin with the .22/250 cartridge you're using is renowned for accuracy, your Howa rifle is a good one and the ADI 2206H powder you're using is top quality, so what you must do is find, by experimentation, an accurate load for this particular rifle. To do this I suggest using the 55gr V-Max projectiles you have and load three cartridges with 32.5gr of ADI 2206H powder, another three with 33.0grs of the same powder, another three with 33.5gr etc up to three cartridges with a maximum of 35.0gr of 2206H powder.

You now have 18 cartridges loaded with varying amounts of powder, so take them along with your rifle to your local range and fire them in sequence, starting with the lightest load, at targets placed at 100m. Choose from the results obtained the load with the smallest group, let's say it's 33.0gr. Now reload another batch of three cartridges using 0.1gr increments starting at 32.6gr up to 33.4gr and again fire them at a 100m target. This procedure may seem a bit complicated but is actually quite simple when you get going and is a really good way of finding the most accurate load of a particular powder for your rifle.

Barry Wilmot

Hot fun with a shotgun

John McDougall

Those who read the 50th edition of *Australian Hunter* will be aware of the Cobaw Private Game Reserve in Victoria for hunting released partridges and pheasants but there's another side to Cobaw - clay target shooting.

Settled amid the Cobaw State Forest lies a beautifully maintained property set aside for the discerning shotgun shooter, novice or corporate client, looking for fun with a shotgun. Run by Jon Thomas and wife

Cate, the sporting clays set-up is another example of the professionalism I've always found with Jon. On arrival the double iron gates open to reveal a magnificent setting hewn from the forest - two cottages, a hunting club and farm structures inhabit the area along with a variety of clay target ranges.

There's tower shooting with several towers set over an area where the 'pegs' or positions can be altered and targets changed to offer the most challenging shooting to be

found anywhere, each tower housing two automatic traps with huge hoppers which can throw targets all day.

The Cobaw Grouse Plate layout is also spectacular where serious shotgunners and beginners alike can enjoy a day of uninterrupted shooting whether over the tower ground, on the driven grouse ground or rabbit trap. Things can be made as difficult as possible to challenge shooters looking to hone their skills or targets can be set simple for the novice or corporate day shooter.



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Hot fun with a shotgun

The Cobaw Grouse Plate is a shotgun team event featuring a captain and three other members in each line-up, five teams shooting for the Grouse Plate trophy, a beautifully engraved silver serving plate the winning team retains for 12 months. To make this day even more challenging, teams are allocated 1000 cartridges which cover practice over the tower shoot layout before the serious competition grouse butts.

The fun of the day is that each shooter is appointed a loader, as with English tradition, so on completion of their two shots - or maybe after just one from a double-barrelled gun - the opened breech is presented to the loader who swiftly reloads the chambers in order for the shooting to proceed.

On the sound of a horn the fun begins as each shooter is presented with 25 targets, some missing their own while picking up those missed by other team members. Towards the end of the shoot it becomes apparent some have shot other shooter's targets or fired two shots to take one clay, and with cartridges limited to one shot per target, picking your clay becomes a skill in itself.

The ability and agility of the loaders is also a sight to behold. When I attended, the Danby team captain used two guns and it was a matter of having one fully loaded at all times to avoid missing any passing targets. It was amazing to watch Andrew Cameron handling both guns with complete safety and deftness.

Among the men was one lady shooter, Rochelle, who shot very well and pushed many of the men to their limits. Her husband Steve, although with another team, capably loaded for her as she busted clay after clay and it was entertaining to watch as loaders acted as a second pair of eyes to locate targets for the shooter they were assisting - all a great prelude to the main event.

The tower ground has an amazing layout, each tower having two automatic, hopper-fed traps at the top with targets remotely thrown by Jon using a pair of console panels. There were close targets missed - often while loading - and a few flying off unscathed but the fervent shooting by team members was riveting, ably assisted by their loaders.

After teams had shot from each of the four pegs alongside and between the

towers, there was a short break before heading to the grouse butts. Now came the moment of decision, the warm-up was over and the shooting would become a bit more serious. Every bird missed was counted by referees scouted from other teams, the counting precise and zealously recorded.

Teams had been named after prominent grouse grounds in England - Danby, Rosedale, Farndale, Bransdale and Snilesworth - and the whole day was typically English in conception while remaining uniquely Australian. Few chose to use a traditional side-by-side shotgun, Browning firearms prominent followed by Berettas with a few double guns, Andrew Cameron opting to use a beautiful matching set of Brownings he brought from Spain. Choked cylinder and cylinder in all barrels, they were ideal for both close shooting over the tower ground and the grouse plate.

The defending team led by Andrew were first to shoot. They faced two sessions straight, each being presented with 25 targets per shooter per visit, alternating grouse butts twice. After all teams had shot their two rounds, the final two alternating rounds would again find team members having shot from all four butts.

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Hot fun with a shotgun

The butts were excellent, built from layers of stone in a traditional manner with huge polythene hoops either side to restrict the shooting area and ensure safe conditions. Shooters were instructed to maintain the forward position in their butts but most shot from within the confining area to one side or slightly rearward for a split-second advantage.

Targets were driven from all angles across the face of the four butts and directly towards them, overhead. Most targets were presented no further than 10 to 15m from the butts but they were midi-targets and flew hard, as you'd expect with driven grouse. Some of them were loaded with flash power and the spectacle when they broke was spectacular. Secret to the game was to keep your gun loaded at all times and ready to the mount, many shots akin to a station eight Skeet with targets speeding overhead.

The shooting was impressive, none more so than by Andrew Cameron as he swapped guns with his loader, ever ready for the next target. Some would fire one shot then

reload, whereas others would shoot two while reloading but Andrew simply changed guns with his loader as soon as a newly-loaded firearm was available.

Reflexive shooters who swiftly put up their gun from a near mounted position seemed to fare best as the flurry of targets was fast and furious, flash targets making it spectacular for onlookers. The black midi-targets were hard to pick up close to the traps but once overhead or to one side were there for the taking against the blue sky.

The toughest aspect was avoiding taking other shooters' targets as the number of cartridges was calculated to match the number of targets thrown, so if you kept hitting your opponents' targets as they passed between, you'd eventually be short of cartridges. It was a great clay target game, challenging the best of shooters and setting new standards for those working on their skills.

Shooting had begun at 10.30am and went on with brief interludes until 2.30pm and was followed by a formal dinner. On completion of the meal Jon Thomas gave

out the day's results judged on the number of targets missed by each team from 600 'birds' over the grouse butts. The Danby team retained the Cobaw Grouse Plate, missing just 74 targets and blitzing their nearest challengers by almost 30 targets, Cameron easily the top gun on the day.

Cobaw Sporting Clays run privately booked corporate and group days during the year and elite bookings throughout the week outside of their regular competition days and beginners can expect excellent tutoring from experienced coaches. The whole complex, immaculately kept and presented, is an indication of the thoroughness and enthusiasm with which Jon approaches the shooting sports.

So for a great day's sport where you'll have enormous fun with a shotgun - whether novice, corporate or enthusiast - Cobaw Sporting Clays fits the bill. I highly recommend a visit and reckon that once you've shot there you'll likely return. More at cobaw.com ●



Cobaw Sporting Clays owner Jon Thomas releases targets remotely from the tower range.



Andrew Cameron, second left, and his winning team with the Grouse Plate trophy.



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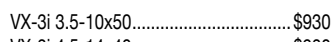
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A breath of fresh air Swarm Fox 10X by GAMO

Con Kapralos

Air guns have come a long way since my childhood (about 40 years ago). I recall the offerings on sale in local discount stores could barely propel a pellet at 500 feet per second, let alone knock a hole in a tin can or see off a pesky starling or pigeon at any distance out to 25m. My brother and I would try to source more powerful springs (from the local automotive spring-maker) to enhance our slug gun but, in the end, we could never find the performance we craved.

Thankfully current air guns are far more sturdy and reliable to the point where some high-end outfits approach the performance of the .22LR rimfire round at 50m. These guns can command prices around \$2000 and upwards and are quality pieces of kit. However, most hunters and shooters looking for an air gun at an affordable price-point are spoiled for choice and precision air guns by GAMO Outdoor Sporting Agencies offer an excellent range.

Their latest, the 10X Multishot Series, presents an option of three air guns - the Swarm Fox 10X, Replay-10 Storm IGT and Replay-10 Magnum - all costing less than \$500 and inclusive of a mounted quality GAMO optic in the package. GAMO distributor Outdoor Sporting Agencies sent *Australian Shooter* the Swarm Fox 10X model in 4.5 calibre (.177) for evaluation, and as it was some time since I last reviewed an air gun the GAMO model was eagerly received.

Swarm Fox 10X features

The Swarm Fox 10X air gun arrived in a GAMO carton complete with

comprehensive user manual, the gun having the following features which make it stand out from the crowd:

- Break-barrel design (380mm barrel) patented polymer jacketed steel barrel with fluted surface muzzle brake.
- Ten-shot cylindrical magazine - two supplied with the gun.
- Steel receiver, spring-loaded piston within.
- GAMO standard optic rail.
- Fitted with GAMO 4x32 air gun scope in quality aluminium rings.
- Space-age automotive-grade glass-filled nylon thumbhole stock with integral cheekpiece.
- Manual trigger safety.
- Rubber recoil pad.
- Weight: 2.89kg.
- Length: 1090mm.
- Available in 4.5mm (.177) calibre - 1300fps, 24 Joule (as tested); 5.5mm (.22) calibre - 975fps, 24 Joule.

At the range

Prior to a range visit, the Swarm Fox 10X user manual was read to familiarise with the operation of the air gun, especially the 10-round magazine system. Two 10-round magazines were supplied and knowing how to remove and load the magazines on to the barrel-mounted magazine clip is imperative before use. Additionally, all scope-mounting hardware was checked to ensure everything was tight.

Outdoor Sporting Agencies also supplied a few tins of quality 4.5mm (.177) calibre air gun pellets and these would be used



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Swarm Fox 10X by Gamo

for setting up the gun's zero and accuracy testing at 25m, firing five 5-shot groups from each brand of pellet. Accuracy testing aside, what was pleasing was the operation of the 10-shot cylindrical magazine in feeding a fresh pellet into the barrel breech with each operation.

The magazines were easy to load and having two with each gun certainly is appreciated. The gun was simple to cock between shots being a break-action design, assisted greatly by the stubby barrel profile and 380mm length. The nylon thumbhole stock was superb in its design and comfortable

to hold, with the cheekpiece fulfilling its purpose well. Air guns seldom require cleaning but I did ensure the bore was clean and unobstructed between shots.

Results of the accuracy test at 25m are listed in Table 1 with star performer being the RWS Meisterkugeln - not all air gun pellets are created equal. The 4x32 GAMO optic was perfectly serviceable but I'd have preferred a fixed 6x scope and something with a fast-focus ocular, as I wasn't able to adjust the reticle focus on the supplied scope.

Field testing

While the GAMO Swarm Fox 10X is a great plinking air gun, I was looking forward to visiting my brother's olive farm to clean up a few pests which tend to accumulate during summer months around the outbuildings. With the gun dialed in for a 25m zero, despatching all manner of starlings, feral pigeons and a few rats was done with ease using the Swarm Fox 10X. Having the 10-shot magazine capacity was most useful and an extra magazine on hand meant reloading was only required after 20 shots.

The GAMO Swarm Fox 10X really made me appreciate how much air guns have improved over the past 30 years and questioned my reasoning for not having one in my gun safe. The Swarm Fox 10X or other GAMO models would be worthy candidates as such.

In summary

The 10X Multishot Series offered by GAMO and Outdoor Sporting Agencies is an excellent package which the user simply needs to sight-in and shoot, the quality GAMO pre-mounted optic and 10-shot magazines exceptional in application and use. The Swarm Fox 10X in 4.5mm (.177) calibre as reviewed is perfect for plinking and tackling small pest species and rabbits out to 30m with the utmost confidence. Priced at just under the \$400 mark, it offers distinction in design and performance from a leader in precision air guns in GAMO with the backing of Outdoor Sporting Agencies in Australia. More at osaaustralia.com.au ●



One of the several test targets shot at 25m with the Swarm Fox.



10-shot magazine positioned in the barrel magazine well and removed.



The muzzle brake serves no purpose to dampen recoil but did curtail muzzle noise.



One of two 10-shot rotary magazines supplied with the Swarm Fox.

Table 1: Accuracy testing - GAMO Swarm Fox 10X Air Gun 5-shot groups in mm at 25m			
Ammunition	Best	Worst	Average
GAMO Pro Match	18	25	23
Cometa Exact Heavy 10.34-grain	13	30	22
H&N Field Target Trophy 8.64-grain	21	29	25
RWS Meisterkugeln 7-grain	10	22	18

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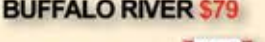
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David Alderson

In the beginning: Magazine Lee-Metford Carbine Mk I

At the time of development and subsequent adoption in 1889 of the Magazine Lee-Metford Rifle Mk I and its black powder-loaded Mk I .303 cartridge, it was standard practice to develop carbine versions for issue to units with no need for a full length infantry arm, in particular cavalry and artillery.

While examples of both were submitted to the Small Arms Committee for evaluation, only a cavalry carbine was developed, being

approved in 1894 and listed as the Magazine Lee-Metford Carbine Mk I. It used the same black powder-loaded ammunition despite the impending adoption of the Magazine Lee-Enfield Rifle Mk I and newly-developed cordite-loaded rounds in 1895.

The carbine differed significantly from the rifle, being almost 10" (25.4cm) shorter and just over 2lb (907g) lighter, and much attention had been given to streamlining its overall shape to make insertion and removal from a saddle-mounted rifle bucket easier. The distinctively shaped Lee 10-round

magazine was shortened to a six-round capacity such that it barely protrudes from the magazine well, the bolt knob was ground flat with the bolt handle itself angled slightly forward and the noscap, with provision for a short clearing rod, had low rounded fore-sight protectors.

Being for cavalry use there was a D-shaped sling loop attached to the left of the butt socket, subsequently removed in 1896, and a sling bar inlet into the right side of the butt. Strangely, the top hand-guard wood extends from the rear sight bed forward to the noscap leaving the rear of the barrel to the knob form bare.

There must have been problems encountered with saddle bucket use, as in 1896 a moulded leather protective cup to completely cover the rear sight was added, simply attached to the fore-end with wood screws. One side was button-holed so the cover could be released, swung under the fore-end and re-attached as shown in the accompanying photos. All Magazine Lee-Metford Carbines were manufactured in the Royal Small Arms Factory at Enfield Lock, England (founded 1816, dissolved 1988) to a total production of only 18,686.

Following adoption of the Magazine Lee-Enfield Rifle Mk I, an almost identical carbine version with Enfield rifling using the same cordite-loaded ammunition was developed and approved in 1896. The easiest way to distinguish between these 'twins' from a distance is the Magazine Lee-Enfield



The Rifle No.5 Mk I (top) and MLM carbine.

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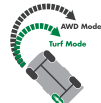
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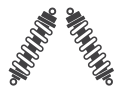
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Cavalry Carbines Mk I and Mk I* don't have a sling bar in the butt and the Mk I* also has no provision in the noscap for a clearing rod. Both Metford and Enfield carbines and rifles were issued concurrently until the Metfords and their black powder ammunition were withdrawn from service in the early 1900s.

The example shown here is from the first year of production (1894) and shows evidence of having had the previously mentioned sling loop on the left of the butt socket removed. The stock bears countless dings and scratches and the bolt is mismatched, only to be expected for a military firearm of this era.

The brass marking disc in the butt stock indicates its issue to the 7th (The Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards, a cavalry regiment first raised in 1688 as Lord Cavendish's Regiment of Horse, renamed for Princess Charlotte in 1788. The regiment saw service in South Africa during the Second Boer War (1899-1902) embarking at Southampton in February 1900. They were involved in patrolling around Bloemfontein and fought mainly as mounted infantry, riding to the scene of the action, dismounting and fighting on foot.

They did have one chance at a proper cavalry charge with drawn swords but a ravine across their line of advance made it necessary to abort. Their major battle was at Diamond Hill on June 11, 1900 where, despite finding their carbines outclassed by

the Boer Mausers, they were the luckiest of the units involved with only four wounded. The shortcomings of their carbines greatly affected morale, made worse on July 11 when 300 Boers ambushed 'C' Squadron near Onderstepoort, killing six men and capturing the rest.

As the war descended into guerrilla tactics, some cavalry units were re-armed with infantry pattern Lee-Enfield rifles and bayonets and tasked with destroying Boer farms and hence their food supply. The 7th

DG later pursued Boer General Christiaan de Wet (guided by his brother Piet!) until he eventually surrendered to them on April 25, 1902.

How this carbine ended up in Australia is uncertain but it's suspected a previous custodian acquired it while on an army exchange posting to the UK in the 1950s. On very occasional trips to the range, results on target are quite pleasing despite a case full (around 60 grains) of 3F behind a 180gr projectile being well short of the





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Due to the bare rear section of the barrel, the heat generated when shooting even these lighter loads on a hot day requires very careful handling. I've read that Breaker Morant was briefly involved with the 7th DG before his Bushveldt Carbineers days so as we collectors so often lament, if only this carbine could talk!

End of the line: Rifle No.5 Mk I

In 1903 a new service arm was adopted - the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield Rifle Mk I - the first of a long family line which in more than 50 years' service endeared themselves to users as the "Smelly". It was considered of suitable length for all branches of the military while the decline and eventual demise of cavalry negated the need for a carbine version. All was fine until in the jungles of South East Asia it became evident that a shorter, lighter arm would be useful.

By this time the British were issued the Rifle No.4 in its various marks, the Australians receiving the Rifle No.1 Mk III*. There were numerous trials of modified versions of both, in Britain as well as in Australia and Canada, eventuating with a shortened and lightened version of the Rifle No.4 being adopted as the Rifle No.5 Mk I in 1944.

A shorter barrel with a flash hider fitted, shorter top handguard leaving almost half the barrel exposed, various lightening cuts to the action body and bolt handle knob all resulted in a rifle just under 21lb (907gm) lighter and almost 5" (127mm) shorter than a No.4. And, harking back to its Lee-Enfield ancestor, it too has a sling bar on the right side of the butt.



It made quite a sporty looking arm which was easier to carry and use in dense, confining vegetation. There are numerous anecdotes regarding excessive muzzle blast and noise, severe recoil and a wandering zero giving unreliable accuracy which made it unpopular with users, but they were still used extensively by British and Commonwealth troops to the end of WWII and during the Malayan Emergency (1948-1960) and are now sought-after collector's items.

The example shown, manufactured in 1947 by BSA, was obtained from a professional roo shooter in the mid-north of South Australia in the 1970s. Bought at a government disposal auction - still in its original grease and apparently un-issued and un-fired - he cleaned it, took 10 kangaroos with his first 12 shots then decided he

didn't like the muzzle blast, noise, heavier recoil and, at night, significant muzzle flash despite the flash hider.

Thankfully he didn't consider rebarrelling or otherwise 'sporterising' it as other than a few minor dings to the stock this firearm is in as near-mint condition as a collector could hope for. It even retains the red and green daubs of paint to indicate safety catch on or off. The icing on the cake was a couple of years later finding the correct knife bayonet in the same near-mint condition. Similarly, on occasional trips to the range, results out to 100m are satisfying with no apparent wandering zero and the noise and visible recoil always draws comment from fellow shooters.

• References: *The British Service Lee* by Ian Skennerton (1982), angloboerwar.com, nam.ac.uk ●



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From Russia with love the Baikal-made rimfire rifle

Senior correspondent John Dunn

Last year I bought three firearms from the deceased estate of a local farmer, none of them anything special just the honest sort of working guns you'd expect a farmer to have. The one thing that set them apart from other farm estates I've acquired over the years is all of them were in very good to excellent condition. Old Bill had obviously looked after them.

One was a Baikal-made Toz-17-01 rimfire rifle, Toz the abbreviation for *Tulsky Oruzheiny Zavod* or the Tula Arms Plant in the former USSR. The 17-01 marque was introduced around 1956-57 primarily as a hunting and sporting rifle and there are still a few in this part of the world so at one time or another they must have been reasonably popular and/or economically priced.

Most I've seen were in fairly sad condition due to general neglect, lost magazines a common problem as are missing rear sights, the latter because the sight had to be removed to fit a telescopic sight. That said, everyone I know who's ever owned one has vouched for the model's accuracy, perhaps another reason for their one-time popularity. To find one in anything like good condition is rare so the day I brought the rifle home I knew I'd have to shoot it to see if all the stories were true.

The rifle

Any number of words could be used to describe the rifle. Pedestrian and agricultural are two that come to mind, neither of them particularly flattering simply because this is about as plain as a firearm can be. Given the Tula Arms Plant was originally established as a military arsenal by Tsar Peter 1 way back in 1712, that's hardly surprising.

Receiver

This is a simple steel cylinder, 24mm in diameter and 184mm long with an 11mm dovetail along the top with the usual ejection port and bolt slot machined in the right-hand side. Forward of the dovetail the rifle is stamped with the triangular Toz insignia, the model number and 'Made in USSR'. The left side has a hole drilled adjacent to the rear end of the barrel to vent gasses in the event of a case head separation and the serial number is stamped forward of the vent hole.

A recoil lug is attached to the bottom of the receiver ring, the bottom of the lug drilled and tapped to accept the main action screw while the short tang section at the rear of the receiver accepts a wood screw that acts as a second attachment point to the stock.

A lightweight steel cap is fitted to the rear of the receiver, presumably to help keep gunk out of the action, and is retained by a pair of spring steel arms with dimples that fit corresponding depressions in the lower quadrant of the receiver body. I've never seen one of these on a Toz before and assume that's because most of them would have been taken off and either lost or thrown away.

Bolt

Like the rest of the rifle the bolt is simply constructed with four main components - the bolt body, bolt handle/cocking sleeve, firing pin/striker and firing pin spring. The bolt body or breech block has a recessed face and twin extractors that guide a cartridge into the chamber or extract a spent one when the bolt is drawn back and an ejector is located inside the bottom of



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From Russia with love - the Baikal-made rimfire rifle

the receiver behind the magazine port. The bolt body also houses the firing pin and spring.

When the bolt handle/cocking sleeve is pushed forward and turned down, the trigger sear catches the striker, holding it back and compressing the firing pin spring. When the trigger's released the striker moves forward, strikes the rim of any cartridge in the chamber and the rifle fires (the firing pin strikes top dead centre). The firing pin spring is quite strong, primarily because much of the early Russian ammunition had steel cases which apparently required a fairly hard firing pin strike to detonate reliably.

Magazine and magazine well

The magazine well is screwed to the bottom of the receiver, the all-steel five-shot magazine clips into the well and is held by a spring-loaded catch at the back. On my rifle the serial number has been electric pencilled on the left side of the magazine followed by the number 2, suggesting the rifle may have originally come with a spare magazine.

Trigger and safety catch

The trigger housing is pressed metal and incorporates a flat main spring secured to the receiver by the rear screw for the magazine well. The trigger sear engages the bolt through a hole in the bottom of the receiver.

The safety catch lever is on the right and pivots in semi-circular cuts on either side

near the receiver bottom. It's engaged by pushing the lever forward where it blocks the trigger from moving. The bolt can be cycled with the safety catch engaged and when the safety is off a red dot is visible on the side of the receiver.

Barrel

This is 50mm long with a diameter of 20mm at the receiver end, tapering to 14.8mm at the muzzle which is uncrowned. It's close fitted to the receiver ring and is retained by a cross pin through the lower quadrant of the receiver. The tangent rear sight is longitudinally dovetailed to the barrel and fixed by a cross pin.

Elevation changes are provided for with a spring-loaded adjuster that locks into notches at various graduated settings on the left of the sight body and there's no windage adjustment. While the adjustable section of the sight can be removed, the base cannot unless the barrel is removed from the receiver.

The front sight is a simple hooded post mounted on a ramp dovetailed and pinned to the front of the barrel. A dovetail in the ramp provides a limited amount of windage adjustment. Set up in the stock the barrel is free floating and the assembled rifle has an overall length of 101cm.

Stock

This is made from a piece of beech wood stained with a walnut finish, has a plastic buttplate stamped "Baikal" with a white

spacer and either side of the pistol grip has a panel of impressed chequering. Narrow, European-style sling swivels are fitted.

A triggerplate and triggerguard are screwed to the underside of the stock and like all the metal work on the rifle with the exception of the bolt, have a nice blue-black finish. Internally the barrel channel and receiver mortice are reasonably well machined with some rough surfaces obvious, no doubt due primarily to the quality of the timber. In terms of feel there's nothing graceful about the stock, it's a handle pure and simple but serves its intended purpose well.

Testing

I fitted an old 6x40 Tasco scope into a high set of Talley mounts which let me get the scope's objective bell forward and above the rear sight. The result wasn't pretty but it worked. For accuracy testing I sighted in using current production Winchester Subsonic ammo at 25m then shot four other brands of ammunition to see how they compared before shifting the targets out to 50m and repeating the process (see table).

With all five types of ammunition the rifle shot sufficiently well to deliver chest of rabbit accuracy at 50m, the RWS Subsonic load capable of head shots at that range so it would seem the rifle's reputation for accuracy with the right ammo was well founded, especially with scope fitted.

Two pertinent observations came out of the range work, firstly the rifle has a very



Component parts of the Toz.

From Russia with love - the Baikal-made rimfire rifle

ordinary two-stage trigger as do many military centrefire rifles of that era. The first stage is long and slow, the second crisp and quite predictable, something of a saving grace when it comes to using the rifle in the field.

The second observation is that despite its clunky appearance and very basic design, the stock works remarkably well, comfortable and practical being all that was required when the rifle was manufactured.

Overview

Though it can't compare to modern rimfires in terms of fit and finish, the accuracy of the Baikal Toz-17 is on a par with the majority of current offerings, subject to the user finding the right ammunition, and I know a few landholders who still carry one in the ute for occasional work around the farm. Some unkind souls suggested that's where it ought to stay while others have come to regard the marque as a bit of a collectors' piece, simply because it's becoming so hard to find one in anything like original condition. It's a rifle of its time, dated in so many ways but still a working firearm in every sense of the word. ●

Ammunition	25m	50m
Winchester Subsonic	13mm	40mm
Winchester T22	12mm	38mm
RWS Subsonic HP	15mm	17mm
Federal Game- Shok	20mm	32mm
Winchester Super Speed	12mm	50mm



Round receiver showing the set-up of the magazine well trigger. Note the main spring is attached to the base of the magazine well.



Rear sight showing the graduated notches along the edge of the tangent. Note the body of the sight is longitudinally dovetailed to the barrel.



The pressed steel protective cap that fits into the rear end of the receiver. These are usually missing from the rifle.



The all-steel magazine holds five rounds.



The stained beech wood stock is reasonably well finished - and no-one can say it doesn't work.



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Chris Redlich

With a degree of 'secrecy' surrounding their new release, I must admit I hadn't heard of optics brand ZeroTech before, but was intrigued by the claim they'd made stating their new riflescopes were designed and built to suit severe Australian conditions.

On being invited to road test their Trace 3-18x50 R3 I accepted the challenge to put it through its paces and assess those bold claims. Designing a product to handle our climatic extremes appears to be an important engineering consideration and marketing factor these days. Australia is after all, one of the harshest, most arid countries on earth - just ask the people trying to make a living from it. If a riflescope can cope with our environment it should be able to deal with almost anything.

ZeroTech: A brief outline

TSA Outdoors (Tasco Sales Australia) have more than 50 years' experience in the optics industry partnered with various other

manufacturers and gave birth to ZeroTech, a subsidiary company using their own engineers and researchers to develop riflescopes by Australians to suit Australian shooters. The Trace 3-18x50 R3 model on review is one of many available in ZeroTech's stable of new scopes.

Out of the box

At first glance I was impressed by the presentation of ZeroTech's packaging of the Trace. Some would say you should never judge a book by its cover but it's hard to argue that a well-presented product goes a long way to forging first impressions. Contained and supported by foam blocks in the box, the Trace 3-18x50 came supplied with instruction manual, reticle ballistics chart, Allen key with three spare grub screws, lens protector tightening tool, cleaning cloth and, attached to the scope, heavy duty alloy flip-up lens protectors.

In the hand the first thing that struck me was the weight - the Trace does not at all feel like a flimsy scope - it looks solid

and robust and weighing in at 817g is not a compact item. By all appearances it's a well-balanced and symmetrically designed affair, the Trace 3-18x50 R3 being a target/hunting scope with all the features required for long-range shooting.

The dioptre adjustment dial is a knurled alloy ring, gripped easily and rotated for a clear view and reticle image, the Trace offering a generous 91-100mm of eye relief. Forward of the ocular lens housing is the magnification dial with all numerical adjustments highlighted in white, the dial having large, machined lugs which promote a firm and easy grip for selecting your chosen magnification.

Occupying the standard six and three o'clock positions on the centre of the scope is ZeroTech's Precision Turret System (PTS), large elevation and windage target-style turrets with clearly embossed, full circumference .25 MOA adjustment markings. Both have a flexible 70 MOA of adjustment while the elevation only has a zero-stop feature. It's important to note

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Trace 3-18x50 R3 by ZeroTech

both turret caps have a lock feature and can only be adjusted when pulled out. On the opposite side of the windage is the parallax adjustment dial which can be set from 25m to infinity.

The 30mm one-piece main tube is made from aircraft grade aluminium and has the ever-popular matte black finish, O-ring sealed and purged with Argon gas making it completely waterproof and fogproof. Perched at the business end of the scope is the 50mm objective lens boasting a clear 92 per cent light transmission with 11.2m field of view at 100m on low power and up to 1.9m on 18x magnification. The fully multi-coated 50mm lens is protected by ZeroTech's weather shield coating.

R3 (SFP) reticle

The R3 reticle is glass etched and sits in the second focal plane (SFP), an advantage of this being the reticle size will not alter with varying magnification. ZeroTech claims their R3 reticle allows the shooter to enjoy all aspects of a second focal plane without losing the ability to hold over with extreme precision for long-range shots.

The R3 reticle features a floating centre dot and sub-tensions of 1 MOA marked by dots with a hash mark every 4 MOA. Heavy bars on the reticle at the 12, three, six and nine o'clock positions make target acquisition a breeze. Apart from my experience using military scopes with graticules and sub-tension indicators, I'd had little exposure to a target reticle of this nature and was keen to put it to use and explore its advantages on the range and in the field.

Range testing

Using the Warne rings supplied by TSA Outdoors, I mounted the Trace on my most target-orientated and favourite hunting rifle in .284 Win. I didn't waste any time sighting-in and on removing the caps to zero the scope, those claims of strong build qualities were apparent on seeing turret shafts made of brass. It's unusual these days to see too many external parts made of metal and the brass component would help explain some of that solid feel when I picked up the scope.

After a brief sighting-in session I made the necessary zeroing adjustments and applied the important zero stop to the elevation turret. Caps back on and I was in business. Initially I was a little concerned at how busy the R3 reticle appeared for close-range target acquisition as I'm not used to target-style reticles of this nature and must admit it took some getting used to.

Once zeroed at 100m, my .284 Win would rarely throw any howlers. Confidence



Undeniable proof of a successful one-off, long-range field test at 900m.

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Trace 3-18x50 R3 by ZeroTech

gained from shooting repeated sub-MOA three-shot groups out of the cabinet from the .284 Win makes this calibre choice perfect for putting the ZeroTech Trace to the test. No point wasting any more time at 100m, I was ready to test the Trace 3-18x50 at extended distances as well as the R3 reticle's long-range capabilities.

The opportunity arose for a Saturday shoot at my local SSAA range and I jumped at the chance to test the Trace at 900m. By my own admission I have limited long-range shooting credentials but, amazingly, my first sighter round had me on paper and with a few elevation adjustments I began scoring.

Using a ballistics chart (courtesy of the internet) gave me enough information to indicate I needed at least 20 MOA of height adjustment to have my .284 diameter 150gr Nosler AccuBond (LR) hunting bullets close to the mark. With the Trace zeroed for 100m, a total of 24 MOA height adjustment was required to keep my elevation at the correct aiming mark.

The day was blustery and I battled easterly and westerly crosswinds, the windage sub-tension markings of the R3 reticle keeping me honest in fighting the wind while still scoring. After recording a total of 38 points using what is essentially a hunting platform, I was satisfied with the result. All concerns I had of the busy R3 reticle at 100m were gone after testing at 900m as the R3 comes into its own at long range and I loved using it for this purpose. The awful heat mirage during the shoot only added to the challenge.

The clarity of the Trace 50mm lens, wound out to 18x power magnification and parallax adjusted for infinity, made light work of clear target attainment. The floating centre dot of the R3 reticle worked well on the lighter background target and with this kind of performance mounted to a hunting rifle, it would give me the confidence required for long-range varminting and hunting.

Conclusion

For an optics manufacturer entering a riflescope market already flooded with numerous brands to choose from, it is vitally important to hit the ground running and ZeroTech have achieved just that with the Trace 3-18x50 R3, offering a quality product packed with loads of features at an attractive price tag of \$899.

After review and extensive testing I concluded that I probably wouldn't use this one for mounting to a lightweight mountain rifle as I believe it's more suitable for the target shooter or hunter who prefers to lie prone, picking off ferals and varmints from a distance.



Magnification dial with large lugs enhance a positive grip.

The Trace 3-18x50 R3 design is attractive and would look right at home mounted to a long-range tactical-style rifle or something similar to that platform and anyway, ZeroTech have other scopes in their range more suited to the mountain hunter.

Confident of their build quality, ZeroTech's optics - including the Trace 3-18x50 R3 - are backed by an 'Any Owner, Any problem, Always Covered' lifetime warranty and with a flying start in the Australian optics market I firmly believe ZeroTech have a bright future. More on the ZeroTech stable at tsaoutdoors.com.au ●



ZeroTech's Precision Turret System (PTS) elevation and windage turrets with a generous 70 MOA of adjustment each.



Sighting in the ZeroTech Trace 3-18x50 required little effort.

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CULLING DILEMMA

a question of education

John Maxwell

As every sporting shooter well understands, objections to hunting and culling of feral animals are more often based on emotion than scientific reality. That's not just a problem for recreational hunters, it's a major headache for national control programs aimed at reducing numbers of foxes, rabbits, feral cats, wild brumbies, deer and pigs and is even more important in the wake of the catastrophic bushfires where introduced species can thrive at the expense of struggling native wildlife.

So how can we convince sections of the community that effective control of feral pests is necessary? The only answer appears to be education and consultation which is the subject of some interesting research out of the University of Sydney, headlined: 'Too cute to cull'.

Researchers note that almost one in five Australians believe introduced horses and foxes are actually native animals while others don't want species they perceive as cute or charismatic to be culled, even when they damage the environment. That hit the

news in January this year when scientists renewed calls for culling of wild horses to help protect native species in Kosciuszko National Park.

This is a red hot topic as feral horses in the Australian Alps have vocal and influential supporters who see them as a part of the national heritage - these are the very animals Banjo Patterson wrote about in *The Man From Snowy River*.

Long before the fires, scientists identified the damage feral horses inflict on the Alps' environment and native animals and their numbers have risen dramatically to around 20,000. "As the climate has warmed, the cool mountain habitat of these species is shrinking and bushfires have decimated a lot of what was left," wrote Professor Jamie Pittock from the Australian National University in Canberra in an article on *The Conversation* website. "Feral horses now threaten to destroy the remainder and an urgent culling program is needed."

Professor Pittock said he flew over the fire-damaged national park by helicopter with members of the Invasive Species

Council, observing large numbers of horses eating the remaining greenery and emerging regrowth. New South Wales won't be doing anything to control feral horse numbers any time soon as legislation passed in 2018 protects them in Kosciuszko. Curiously, this was opposed by environmental groups and passed with the support of the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party.

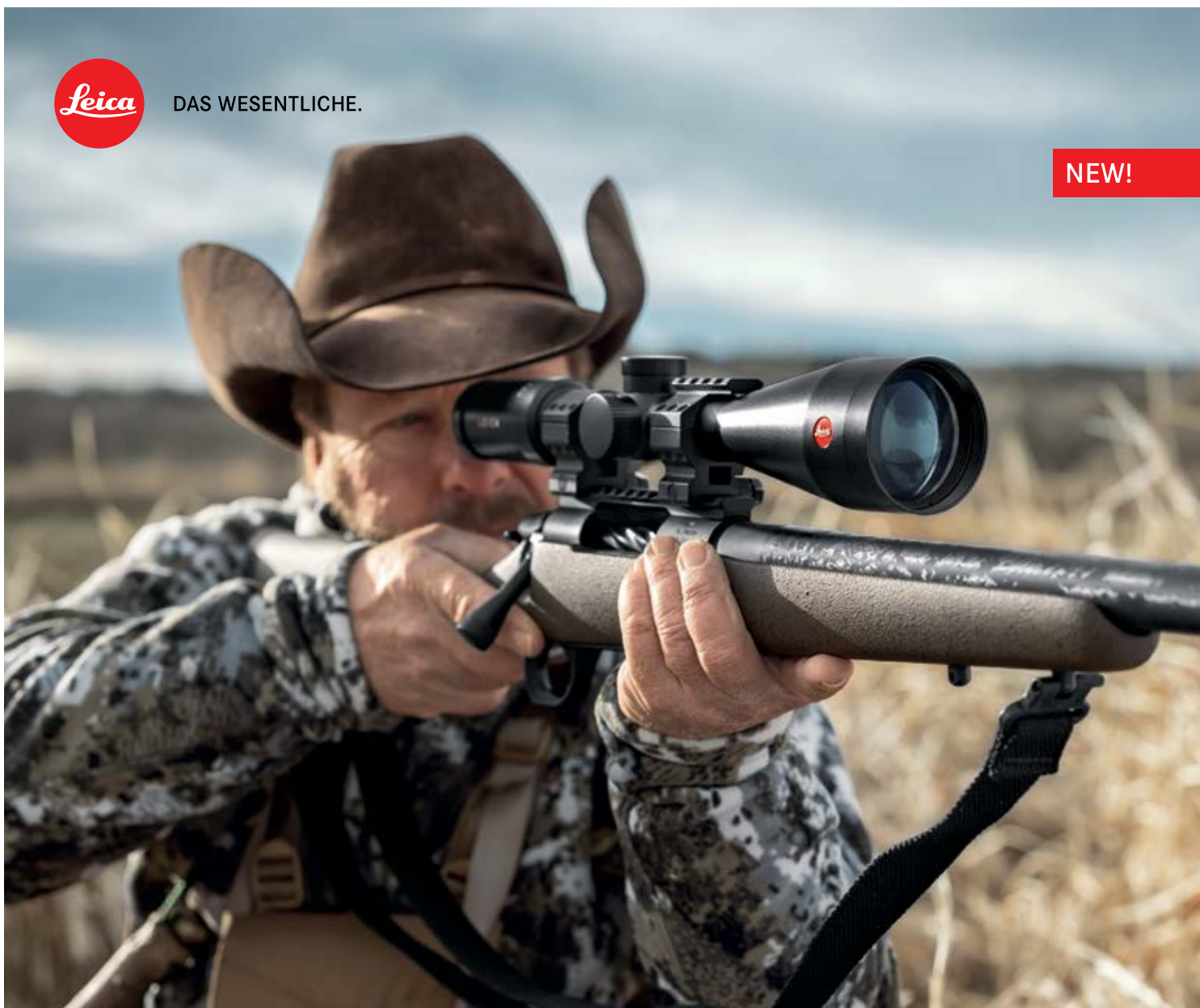
The Sydney University researchers said to manage the environment effectively, including after bushfires, we need to understand the diversity of opinion on what constitutes a native animal and recognise how these attitudes can change. "The distinctions many Australians draw - native animals are good and introduced species bad - shape how people view conservation efforts," they said.

"A survey we conducted in 2017 found people are more likely to disapprove of lethal methods for managing species they perceived to be native. In the same survey we found almost one in five Australians considered horses and foxes to be native to Australia, which suggests either people



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Culling dilemma a question of education

lack knowledge of Australia's natural history or disagree with conservationists' definition of animal 'nativeness'."

Their article notes that native species are usually defined as those present before European settlement began in 1788.

"Some people, including scientists, say we should just accept introduced species as part of Australia's fauna. They argue current management justifies killing based on moral, not scientific judgements, and introduced animals may increase biodiversity," they wrote.

"But the issue remains extremely divisive. A central tenet of traditional conservation is that humans have a duty to protect native species and ecosystems from the threat introduced species pose. It's difficult to do this without culling introduced animals."

That said, attitudes do shift over time. Horses and foxes may one day come to be viewed as natives and where once camels and donkeys were regarded as valued and useful transport animals, in the wild they are now regarded as pests. Some native animals, such as kangaroos and possums, can also be treated as pests when numbers become excessive.

And what's native to one part of Australia

is an introduced species in another. Koalas on Kangaroo Island, particularly hard hit by bushfires, aren't locals and had been managed as a pest, though by fertility control rather than culling. Already the states are responding to the bushfires with programs to help native animals as, in the burnt landscape, survivors are easy prey to feral predators.

In January, NSW launched what it says is the biggest-ever feral pest eradication program in the state's history which includes aerial and ground shooting of deer, pigs and goats as well as a baiting program. Victoria has launched a similar venture.

The Sydney University researchers queried whether the public would be on board. "Widespread media coverage of the recent fires and their impacts on wildlife, including the loss of more than a billion animals, might garner support for protecting native wildlife from pests," they said. "On the other hand, efforts to manage animals such as cats and horses might be hampered by a lack of public support for culling charismatic animals which many people value or view as belonging in Australia now."

They said we may never all agree on how best to manage native and non-native



Wild horses wreak havoc in the Australian Alps.

species. "But effective environmental management, including after bushfires, requires understanding the diversity of opinion," they said. "Doing so can help develop management plans the public supports and allow effective communication about management that's controversial." ●

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Keeping up the good work

Miroku MK38 Monte Carlo

Paul Miller

Last year we reviewed the silver-actioned Miroku ML11 All Clays shotgun imported by Outdoor Sporting Agencies of Melbourne, a gun designed by Rod Laidlaw at OSA to be a more than useful medium to high rib competition sporter. It was equally suitable for Trap or Skeet shooting due to the gun's versatility with raised rib and adjustable comb to elevate the pattern for those wishing to shoot the Trap disciplines where targets are all rising and going away from the shooter.

The MK38 MC Trap gun under review here is essentially the same firearm mechanically but is the original MK38 model which has been popular in the UK for many years, numerous writers and commentators saying this option is the one all other mid-priced alternatives are compared to there.

BC Miroku Manufacturing of Japan has been making firearms since the late 1800s and is located on the small southern

island of Shikoku. The firm has grown rapidly since the end of World War Two when, after several years, it was allowed to again start producing various firearms and has become one of the world's most successful manufacturers.

Stock and fore-end

This MK38 has a moderately figured and lacquer-finished walnut stock that's unusual nowadays considering we're so used to oil finished stocks in Australia. The finish on the stock and fore-end is more American in style and reminiscent of the US Browning Citori of earlier days. Should you scratch it it's harder to bring back to new but is far more waterproof than an oil finish and certainly comes across as smart, setting the tone for what is a good-looking gun. Even the Miroku emblem under the pistol grip is laser-etched perfectly.

The non-adjustable Monte Carlo stock worked well for guys who tried the gun, encouraging an upright head position.

Short-necked shooters would be better with a conventional Trap stock while medium to longer-necked shooters will find this gun comfortable to handle. Stock measurements are a fine example of typical Monte Carlo Trap dimensions, the stock registering 1.5" at the front of comb and 1.5" at the rear. The drop at heel is 2" which is standard on other Monte Carlo-shaped stocks and provides a pretty good compromise for the average shooter.

The parallel section ensures the same sight picture wherever the cheek is located along the comb, facets designed to allow the shooter to look down on the rib and out to the target and shoot elevated patterns. At the plate the gun patterned 80 per cent above the aiming mark and 20 per cent below for me, ideal for rising, departing targets so you can touch the bottom of the target as you pull the trigger and follow through. If this is too high the parallel section would have to be lowered by a professional stockmaker and refinished.



This Month's Vortex Specials

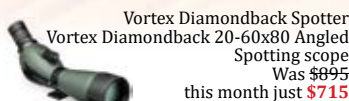


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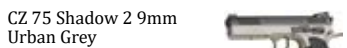
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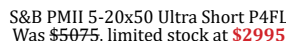
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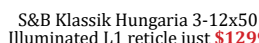
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Miroku MK38 Monte Carlo



The gun appeared to have a small amount of cast off and the comb seemed tapered ever so slightly off for a right-handed shooter. I guess that's why as a lefty I got along well with it. The stock has a thick, well-shaped Trap pad that looks like it was made by Pachmayr for Miroku. It's comfortable when mounted in the shoulder pocket and spreads recoil over the shoulder area as effectively as possible to help reduce felt recoil and fatigue, highly relevant if you need to line up for a shoot-off at day's end.

The generous competition-style pistol grip combines a substantial and comfortable palmswell for right-handed shooters but felt fine to this lefty. The fore-end is of the beavertail style, a shape invariably associated with Trap guns where a precise and repeatable grip is an advantage. They're usually parallel sided so wherever they're gripped the hand is in the same

relationship to the barrels. There's an old theory that the closer your hands can be to the axis of the shotgun the better you'll shoot - one I'm inclined to believe - and the narrower beavertail fore-end may well benefit the shooter in this regard. It certainly felt good to me.

This fore-end is easily detached from the barrels with a single lever like all Miroku shotguns. The chequering on stock and fore-end is fine, generous and well executed, giving a comfortable and secure grip without feeling noticeable and potentially affecting concentration.

Barrels and rib

The barrels are 30" long with 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " chambers and bored for concealed screw-in Invector Plus chokes with three supplied in the classic Trap shooter's constrictions of half, three-quarters and full. It states on the

tube that steel through this modified choke is actually full choke - do not shoot steel through the tighter chokes.

Another outstanding feature is the medium high rib which steps up quickly in a slightly concave curve from the breach to a height of 10mm then gradually back to 6mm high at the muzzle. It's supported by 12 posts of varying heights to allow for the rib dropping down to the muzzle.

The rib itself is 9mm wide over the action and tapers to 7mm at the muzzle, drawing the eye nicely out to the target and I believe this rib configuration in combination with the Trap stock dimensions is the secret to this gun's excellent performance on Trap targets.

Between the barrels the rib is ventilated. There's one fine white centre bead and a green hi-viz front sight at the narrower muzzle end with other coloured



The ever-reliable Miroku box lock action with gold-plated trigger.

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Miroku MK38 Monte Carlo

replacement hi-viz tubes provided. The barrels are beautifully blued and over-bored at 18.6mm and the forcing cones extended which contributed to a comfortable shooting experience and lack of first barrel muzzle jump, meaning the second barrel can be used much more quickly if needed.

Action

This MK38 features a silver nitride action with the classic decorative engraving pattern we've seen on these guns in shooting magazines from the UK over the years. Some people prefer game scene engraving but this pattern really complements the gun.

Miroku shotguns have a full width hinge pin which provides a substantial surface area for smooth opening and closing, lock-up achieved with a full width flat bolt that fits into a bite beneath the bottom chamber.

This method of locking up the action is immensely strong. The gun opens smoothly and closes with an impressive click rather than a clunk due to amazingly tight tolerances in the CNC manufacturing process and is as impressive as some far more expensive guns.

The opening lever and trigger selector incorporated in the safety are equally precise, the gold-plated trigger also adjustable for 'length of finger comfort' and the gun provided with two other width trigger shoes to accommodate personal preference. The trigger pulls broke cleanly at around 4lb, ejectors worked immaculately with factory loads and the metal-to-wood fit of action to stock and fore-end iron is excellent.

Shooting impressions

I had a successful session on the Trap range with this MK38 where its speed of handling made getting on to targets quickly and precisely a breeze. The 30" barrels contributed to this liveliness and the gun balanced perfectly over the hinge pin.

I was surprised at how well the Monte Carlo also worked on the Skeet layout but with half and three-quarter chokes I missed a couple due to those tight constrictions (that's my excuse for what it's worth). However, the other targets were ink-balled.

A couple of mates tried it at Skeet and found the Monte Carlo suited them as well. Clearly this is a good specialist Trap gun but a bit of fun experimentation on other types of targets doesn't hurt. The medium-height stepped rib meant targets could be picked earlier shooting from the gun-up position with no distraction in the field of view from the barrels below, a feature many Trap shooters take seriously with this cleverly



Classic MK38 engraving style and step up to the elevated rib.



Investor Plus concealed chokes in half and three-quarters destroyed DTL targets.

designed and tapered rib. It encouraged a comfortable upright head position which aids enormously when it comes to improved vision and target acquisition.

This gun is expected to retail for about \$2300, amazing value for such a well-designed and specialised Trap gun. I'm told it can be had with a basic plastic Negrini-style case for about another \$100 or a combination lock case for \$160 (check with your dealer). This is a genuinely impressive competition gun which comes highly recommended. ●

Specifications:

Manufacturer: BC Miroku Japan

Model: MK38 Monte Carlo Trap

Gauge: 12-gauge

Action: Box-lock inertia cocking

Trigger: Single selective, tang safety, two spare trigger shoes

Barrel length: 30" with 2¾" chambers

Rib: Medium height, 10mm maximum tapering to 6mm, 9mm wide tapering to 7mm at muzzle.

Chokes: Three Investor Plus. Half, three-quarters and full.

Stock and fore-end: Quality walnut with polyurethane type finish, medium pistol grip and slim beavertail fore-end

Stock dimensions: 1.5" at comb and 1.5" rear comb with 2" at heel. Almost neutral cast-off (slightly right-handed) with 360mm (14.25") length of pull

Weight: Approximately 8lb (3.7kg) subject to walnut density

Accessories: Choke wrench, instruction manual

RRP: Approximately \$2300

Distributor: Outdoor Sporting Agencies, Melbourne

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Quirks work

for Browning's bold venture

Senior correspondent John Dunn

During the past few years I've had the chance to review three different straight-pull rimfire rifles, all of which I found very shootable, and I'm aware of how popular straight-pull shotguns have become. So when Winchester Australia offered *Australian Shooter* a Browning Maral SF Big Game straight-pull rifle for review, I was happy to accept mainly because I wanted to know how it worked.

The rifle arrived in a Browning-stamped, purpose-built ABS carry case and such devices always imply something special. Assembly took no time at all and the completed rifle had a touch of the 'wow' factor with its high-quality wood and metal-work, mechanical excellence and Belgian pedigree.

Rifle

The Maral bears more than a passing resemblance to the BAR it was adapted

from. The receiver is similar and even uses the same rotating bolt head system though the way it operates is quite different. Introduced in 2014, it came into being as a result of makers like Browning moving to comply with changing regulations in European countries and increasing restrictions on the use of self-loading firearms.

The owner's manual describes the Maral as a manual linear bolt-action using a servo bolt return system, industry speak for a straight-pull rifle with a breech that closes itself when the bolt handle is released. How all that is achieved is what makes the rifle so interesting.

Receiver and action

The steel receiver is flat-sided with a blue-black finish which highlights the panels of high relief engraving - wild boar on the right, maral (deer) on the left - the top drilled and tapped to accommodate bases for mounting a scope.

Internally the receiver houses a two-piece bolt with fixed body and rotating bolt head. The bolt body rides in grooves machined into either wall, a pair of arms extending forward of the breech to engage with a spring housing under the barrel. The housing accommodates two flat section springs attached to and wound around a transverse pin through the walls, the tail ends of the springs secured by an anchor block screwed to the bottom of the barrel.

As the bolt is pulled back the springs unwind, coming under linear tension as they're stretched straight and flat and when the bolt handle is released, the springs snap back into their stable, wound position, dragging the bolt assembly with them to close the action. As the bolt closes it strips a cartridge off the top of the magazine and pushes it into the chamber as the action is locked by the rotating bolt head.

The bolt head rotates courtesy of a helical slot machined in its stem. The stem slips



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Quirks work for Browning's bold venture



Set up for testing with a 3-9x42 Meopta Meopro scope.

inside the bolt body where it's held in place by a through pin. When pressure is applied to the face of the bolt as it's closing, the bolt head turns clockwise with the locking lugs around its circumference engaging corresponding slots and lugs inside a bolt casing machined integral to the breech end of the barrel. With the bolt closed the breech of the barrel is totally enclosed inside the bolt casing, the only straight-pull to do so.

Lock up is secure, assisted I expect by the pressure applied forward of the breech by the bolt springs. Essentially the locking system uses an interrupted thread, the similarities obvious when the rifle is turned over and interaction of the various parts viewed closely through the magazine well.

With bolt closed the Maral is locked and loaded but not yet cocked as to do that a hand cocking button on the tang of the receiver must be engaged by pushing it



With the magazine empty the bolt stays open.

forward until it locks into place and a red dot appears on the tang.

Trigger group

Unlike conventional bolt-actions the trigger group is not directly connected to the bolt, it's a unit acting independently, an

important safety feature as it means the rifle can be carried with a cartridge in the breech but can't be fired until the hand cocking lever is engaged. This compresses a hammer spring and cocks the hammer, both of which are part of the trigger group.

When the trigger is depressed the hammer swings up to strike the rear of the bolt and fire the rifle, the bolt then pulled back and released to reload until such time as no more cartridges remain in the magazine. When that happens, the bolt will stay open. If no shot is taken the rifle can be made safe again by disengaging the hand cocking button and decompressing the hammer spring.

The trigger group is secured in the bottom rear of the receiver by four small screws and like the base of the magazine well the triggerguard is made of black



Engraved images of deer on left side of the panel.



Component parts of the Maral.

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plastic with a gold embossed Browning deer head on the outside of the bow. The trigger weight is factory set at 1kg +/- 100g with a minimum of take-up, making it comfortable and efficient to use. A trigger lock is supplied.

Magazine

This has a steel box with a black plastic base and green plastic follower and held four rounds of .308 in staggered columns (in Magnum calibres that capacity is three). To insert, the magazine is hooked under a crossbar at the front of the well and swung up into place, secured by a lever at the front of the triggerguard and when released the magazine drops directly into the hand. A 10-shot magazine is available.

Barrel

The fluted, hammer-forged barrel has a length of 56cm, a diameter of 31.5mm at the knox-form, tapering to 17mm at the muzzle which has a square cut recessed crown, the rear sight fitted to a battue rib screwed to the top of the barrel. An extended ramp almost 17cm long, it has a central white line that leads the eye to a U-notched rear sight with fluorescent green fibre optic dot on either side. The rib can be replaced by a fixed rear sight supplied with the rifle and stored in the carry case.

The fore sight is also ramped with a fluorescent red dot adjustable vertically and horizontally if required. As it comes from the factory the sights are adjusted for 90m using Winchester ammunition of an unspecified bullet weight. Stampings on the left of the barrel indicate the rifle was made for Browning International Belgium by FN Herstal and assembled in Portugal by Browning Viana. The calibre is stamped on the right side.

Woodwork

Both buttstock and forearm are made from Grade III Turkish walnut, beautifully finished to bring out all the character of the grain. The buttstock is European in design with a hog's back comb complemented by a sculpted cheekpiece on the left-hand side. The butt is fitted with an Inflex Technology recoil pad, one of three supplied with the review rifle, all of differing thicknesses to provide choices on stock length and length of pull. The pistol grip has a comfortable palmswell and panel of fine chequering.

The forearm is quite long at 34cm, hollowed out to accommodate and hide the arms and spring housing set-up of the bolt mechanism. At the rear, short wings project back over the front edges of the receiver on either side, the rounded bottom hand-filling



View through the magazine well. Bolt body on left, pinned to rotating bolt head ready to turn into the breech shroud via an interrupted thread.

with a wrap-around panel of fine chequering, finger ridge and flared fore-end tip.

Cleaning

Given the Maral has an enclosed receiver, the barrel can only be rod cleaned from the muzzle which raises two potential problems - that residues from the barrel will be pushed into the action and a chance of muzzle damage from the rod - though both can be overcome quite simply. With the magazine in place and bolt held open a rod can be inserted from the muzzle, a brush attached inside the receiver then drawn back to take any residue out the muzzle, the use of a rod guide at the muzzle recommended. Alternatively the barrel can be cleaned with a bore snake.

Range testing

For testing I fitted the Maral with a 3-9x42 Meopta Meopro supplied by Winchester, set up in QD mounts on two-piece Recknagel bases. I sighted it in and test fired at 100m using a packet each of 150gr Deer Season and Power-Point loads as well as 168gr Ballistic Silvertips, only the Deer Season load shooting consistently, producing three-shot 18-26mm groups off the bench.

The other two loads are capable of taking pig or deer-sized animals at 100m but obviously aren't on the Maral's preferred list.

Overview

The rifle was comfortable to shoot, the trigger a tad on the heavy side but manageable. The action functioned flawlessly, reloading quickly with a minimum of sight disturbance when shooting offhand and recoil was inconsequential.

I like quality firearms and that's exactly what the Maral is. I can see the marque winning a following among hunters chasing pigs in the lignum country or sambar hunters working over the hounds and there are lots of professional shooters out there who could put it to good use, especially in feral animal control. ●



Ramped fore sight is adjustable for windage and elevation.

Specifications

Make: Browning

Model: Maral SF Big Game

Receiver: Enclosed, blued steel with engraved side plates

Action: Rotary head straight-pull bolt with servo return

Magazine: 4 + 1 (tested) 10 + 1 available, 3 + 1 in Magnum calibres

Trigger: Two-stage, 1kg +/- 100g weight of pull compatible with Browning International S.A. European Safety Standards

Safety: Tang mounted trigger cocking button

Barrel: 56cm hammer forged, fluted with blued finish

Calibres: .308 (tested) .30-06, .300 Win Mag, 9.3x62

Sights: Battue rear, ramp-mounted front adjustable for windage and elevation, receiver drilled and tapped for scope mounts, alternative open sight supplied with rifle

Stock: Two-piece Grade III Turkish walnut with interchangeable butt pads, sling swivels supplied

Weight: 3.2kg

Case: Fitted ABS plastic carry case supplied

Distributor: Winchester Australia

RRP: \$3595

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A man wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a dark jacket is kneeling in a forest. He is holding a black rifle with a scope in his right hand and the antler of a dead sambar deer in his left hand. The deer is lying on the ground in front of him. The background consists of dry grass and fallen tree trunks.

Any sambar is a trophy sambar!

Anthony Tammett

It was still dark when we left our truck at the fire trail on a ridge of thickly-forested hills that ringed the vineyard like a giant evergreen crown on an inky, pitch black and bitterly cold morning. As we made our way silently over damp soil I pulled the collar of my jacket around my neck and slipped on gloves to ward off the chill, the darkness wrapping around us like a blanket.

The forest was strangely quiet and the

usual chattering of birdlife surprisingly absent as we neared our target - shallow, forested gullies snaking down from the ridge towards the vineyard on our left and dense forest on the other side. The edge of the eastern sky to our left offered a faint blush of light, the promise of dawn soon to come.

Scouting the area the previous day we spotted several game trails criss-crossing the gullies a few dozen metres below the ridge, thick with heavy imprints of deer

tracks in the soft, damp soil. Searching for a commanding position I settled for a seat on a fallen tree trunk a few metres below the left of the ridge, my hunting buddy Mauro taking a similar position on the gully to the right of the ridge with his constant companion, Sera, an 18-month-old German shorthaired pointer.

Gradually the sky began to brighten and without warning the dark silhouette of a sambar stag materialised like





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Any sambar is a trophy sambar!



Sambar Expressway - a heavily used track for quick access to the vineyard; Possible stag rubbings on a tree on the fire trail.

a phantom on the game trail 60m below and moving quickly towards me. I slowly raised the Sako and when the cross-hairs settled on the front of his shoulder squeezed off a shot. After briefly losing sight of the stag during recoil, to my astonishment he spun around and took off from whence he came, disappearing over the gully ridge 20m away.

I watched in disbelief. The stag had shown no sign of being hit yet the relatively easy shot from the .300 Winchester Magnum had felt good. Moreover, no game animal hit with its 150gr polymer-tipped bullet had ever moved more than a few metres. My confusion was interrupted by Mauro who'd heard the shot and arrived with a hopeful look on his face. "What happened?" he asked with Sera at his side.

We were now in day three of a four-day hunt for venison or a trophy at the end of June in one of Victoria's celebrated alpine valleys, an area renowned for its fertile and productive soils rich with walnut, chestnut, apple orchards and large

vineyards, famed for their excellent wines.

The property we were hunting was a large working vineyard of more than 170,000 vines in a picturesque mountain valley surrounded by forested hills. The deer, almost completely nocturnal in their habits, feasted on Prosecco, Chardonnay and other types of vines in the spring and summer - often causing considerable damage - and the plentiful clover growing between the rows in winter.

The property owners have a cottage available for guests looking for a farm stay and welcome hunters who help minimise damage to the vines. Several days of careful stalking both morning and afternoon had, because of the nocturnal habits of deer, resulted in only one brief flash-sighting despite the abundant fresh sign everywhere.

In another instance we were honked when an erratic wind carried our scent to a sambar in a gully some distance away. Having experienced this alarm sound at a range of 20m some years ago, I can

vouch for the almost physical effect it has in temporarily disarming a hunter and allowing the quarry to escape.

Sambar, because of their nature, are extremely difficult to hunt by stalking and the popularity of hunting them with hound teams in Victoria has its origins in that very fact. Sambar are solitary, not a herd deer like red and fallow, extremely shy and wary, rarely seen in open country and never far from good cover. Their big sensitive ears, like rotating radar dishes, pick up the slightest disturbance even a careful hunter makes among the undergrowth and litter of a eucalypt forest.

Unlike most deer their breeding cycle is irregular although stags are more likely to be in hard antler during the winter months. They're big, tough animals and although the minimum legal calibre is .270 Win, many hunters prefer larger calibres, in some cases even up to the .375 H&H Magnum.

All these traits, coupled with the nature of the country they inhabit,





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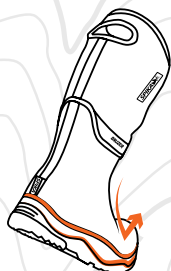
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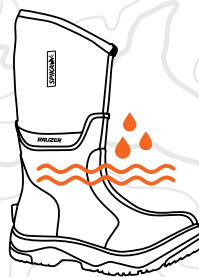
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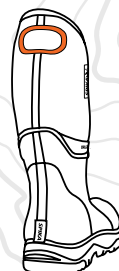
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Any sambar is a trophy sambar!

make them probably the hardest animal in Australia to hunt, at the very least the hardest deer species. Hunting with hounds - which involves finding a valley or gully with fresh deer sign then positioning hunters in likely escape routes and finally releasing the hounds to drive the deer to the shooters is usually successful - as is hunting with night vision devices where legal. But we had chosen to hunt by stalking and were receiving an incisive lesson in the difficulties involved.

Sambar were introduced to Victoria, north-east of Melbourne, in the 1860s (Arthur Bentley, *Deer of Australia*) and other liberations followed. They're Australia's most successful deer introduction, no doubt partly due to the similarity of local plants to their native Indian habitat. The vanguard of the herd reached the ACT many years ago and it's extremely likely that, given their historical rate of dispersal, sambar will eventually colonise the Great Dividing Range all the way to Queensland.

"What happened?" my friend repeated, shaking me from my bewilderment. "I fired at a spiker and was sure I hit him but he showed no sign of being wounded. Let's check the game trail." Having little doubt the shot had been on target, we dropped into the gully and quickly picked up a blood



The vineyard in early morning looking north-east towards the Victorian Alps.

trail. "Too right", I thought, "slow down and give him time to stiffen up, he won't get far." We slowly and carefully followed the trail over the lip of the gully, losing it several times before finding it again.

Convinced he was close we pushed on with the help of the dog who by now had the stag's scent and quickly found him in nearby undergrowth. The stag suddenly scrambled to his feet, moved a few metres and paused. Mauro, who was leading, despatched a finishing shot. The total distance over steep and broken ground from where he was first sighted was less than 90m.

This stag was a spiker in superb condition and the tough job of processing and

salvaging meat on the steep, uneven terrain took several hours. I hadn't allowed enough lead and the first shot had just missed vital organs although the stag clearly wasn't going anywhere. Fortunately we were able to bring the truck closer along the fire trail, which considerably shortened the distance over which the meat had to be packed out.

As food is always the key to wildlife we judged that a return trip in spring, when the vines were sprouting their buds, would be most productive for a trophy stag. But as someone rightly said, 'any sambar is a trophy sambar!' ●

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Jeremiah's Collins No. 18 knife and its No.13 sheath.



Fitting tribute to a historic knife

Jeremiah

My mother-in-law, Daphne, was a real gem, a remarkably independent woman who had a great zest for life and the instincts of a bowerbird - fortunately. At the celebration of my big Five-0 some years ago when we lived in Canberra, she kindly gave me a present and said: "I think you'll like this."

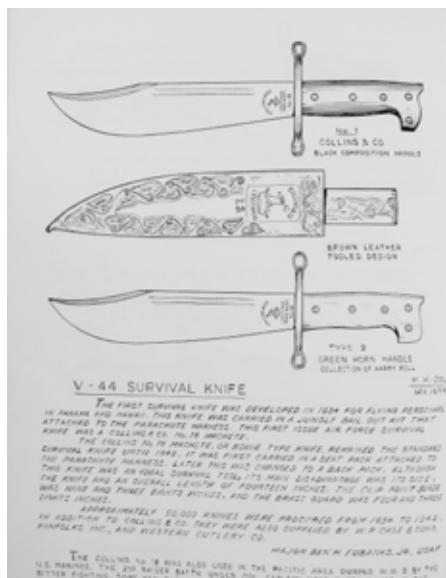
I was thrilled as it was a large Bowie-style knife in a tooled leather sheath, obviously not of recent origin and in excellent condition. About a week later in Melbourne I was browsing a technical bookshop in my lunch hour and to my joy and surprise spotted on the sale table a book entitled *US Military Knives, Bayonets and Machetes* by M.H. Cole (Book III).

The subject was not of immediate interest but on the cover was a picture of the knife I'd received for my birthday. Some quick scanning and the reduced price convinced me I needed the book for future reference when I had time to read it in depth.

Studying the book revealed that what Daphne had given me was an example of the V-44 survival knife developed in America in 1934 - my birth year. The first issue of the knife was by Collins and Co., stamped No.18 and issued with a tooled leather sheath stamped with the number 13. This was the very knife I now possessed. Western Cutlery, Kinfolks and Case made others but illustrations in the book showed only the Collins No.18 had

more than three rivets in its composition handle.

Apparently, in WWII the Collins No.18 was issued exclusively to the 2nd Battalion United States Marine Corps (USMC) Raiders, other battalions being issued with different knives. The USMC 2nd Battalion - or Carlson's Raiders as they were known (after their Commander) - had 1000 Collins No.18 knives issued for the island campaign in 1942 and all were numbered from 01 through to 1000 though only about a dozen of these can be traced. As a collectable knife the Western V-44 is the rarest as the least number of these were produced but the Collins No.18 is the one sought after by Raiders veterans.



Knives by other makers and the Collins No.18 with its No.13 sheath; A page from the book featuring Carlson's Raiders, their insignia and an original knife of the 1000 issue.

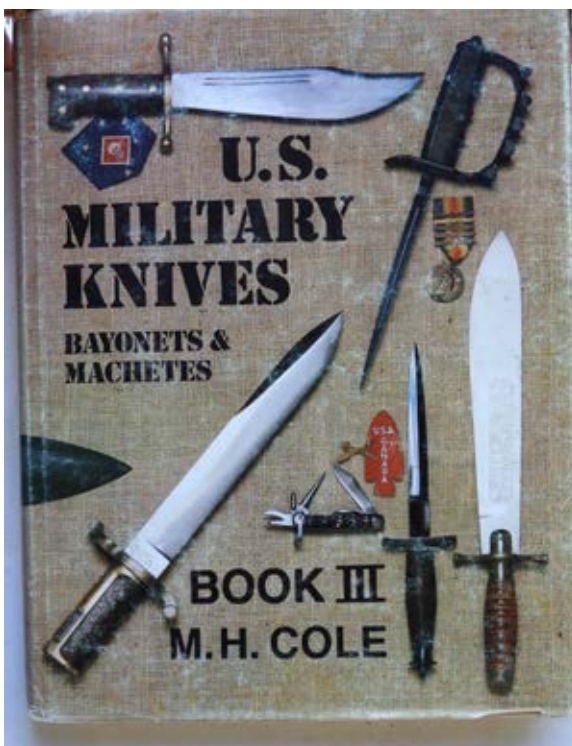
It was also referred to as the 'gung ho' knife after the Raiders' battle cry which, in Chinese, means "work together". How different is the real meaning of this phrase compared to the erroneous interpretation perpetuated by the media in its beat-ups about the use of firearms and John Rambo?

I've treasured and cared for my Collins No.18 since the day I received it but always felt it should be displayed in a manner more befitting its heritage - it cried out to be cased. My knife wasn't one of those issued to Carlson's Raiders but I chose to commemorate this connection so relevant to Australia when you consider the island campaigns so close to our shores.

As luck would have it Cole's book also included several pages on the history of the knife and its use by the USMC Raiders as well as the derivation of their distinctive and colourful insignia. The Raiders originally had an unofficial emblem featuring a skull superimposed on a lightning bolt crossing over the outline of a Collins No.18 knife, this later modified for use as a calling card left by the 2nd Battalion Raiders which featured the skull on crossed scimitars on an orange background.

Eventually this was further modified into the Raiders' patch of a white skull on red diamond background on a royal blue patch which included the six stars of the Southern Cross in white. They retained their 'calling card' patch.

In my efforts to obtain authentic copies of these unit insignia I contacted the US Embassy in Canberra and was referred to none other than a USMC Marines Officer, Major Rob Rutledge. We became quite



The cover of Cole's book.

good friends and 'traders' in the ensuing weeks and I obtained a beautiful sterling silver and gold USMC officer's cap badge, just the thing to feature in a casing of the

knife with the USMC insignia. Rob also gave me contact details for the USMC Gift Shop in the US from which I completed my collection of badges. As an aside I learned that Raiders badges were first produced in Australia by Cash & Co. of Melbourne. They're still in business today and who hasn't bought Cash's names to sew on their children's school clothes?

Unfortunately it has been many moons since I embarked on the assembly of items for the eventual casing of the knife. Postings to and from Canberra have come and gone and only just recently I discovered all the bits and pieces while cleaning out my hobby room. The knife, of course, has always had pride of place in my display cabinet, the casing now complete and enhanced with a gold bullion reproduction of the USMC crest I had copied in Pakistan along with my No.2 Sqn crest.

And I guess that's what collecting is all about. There's a unique feeling associated with the acquisition of an item of historic significance then spending many hours researching and planning a suitable means for its display and preservation. I never intended the casing of this knife to be so delayed but there's a quiet pride that comes with the completion of the preservation of a piece of our heritage and being able to share it with others. ●

Restoring that early model Brno .22LR



Nice job - the refurbished Model 2.

Sam Garro

It had been a while since my last field outing on rabbits and I couldn't wait to try my recently acquired 1967 Brno Model 2 .22LR. Before the last buy-back, between October 1996 and September 1997, I hunted with a Ruger .22LR self-loader with 10-shot rotary magazine topped with a 4x fixed scope, the short barrelled rifle accurate, light and a joy to shoot. It was replaced a couple of years later by a Winchester 52B .22LR, another accurate rifle with attractive walnut stock I held for several years.

But often in life we tend to divert or change preference for what we perceive as an improvement on what we may already have or simply to acquire one more firearm that stirs the interest. As a gun enthusiast I'm always on the lookout for something special, especially in the vintage or 'old-school' category. In this instance after shooting a mate's 1960s Brno .22LR and being impressed by its quality build, slickness and accuracy, my focus was on sourcing a similar rifle of the era.

It took a while as a 'good to very good' condition Brno 22LR is not easy to come by at an affordable price but, with a bit of persistence, I found a Brno Model 2 .22LR

made in 1967 as denoted by the numbers '67' imprinted on the receiver and barrel near the receiver.

Normally I'm wary of buying a firearm from a website or sight-unseen scenario for a range of reasons, but the price was reasonable and I could address any cosmetic fix. While you tend to rely on the seller's description, at times details are scant or not to the buyer's satisfaction and it's a good idea to contact the seller or dealer direct for as much information as possible in respect to the overall condition of the firearm and any history.

For example, faded or missing metal blueing, extent of wear in the rifling, externally and internally metal pitting, cracks or chips on the stock, any repairs and originality of the firearm, especially in the case of a vintage and/or expensive one, its history and previous use can have a bearing or help in the decision-making process.

In this case I rang the owner and asked all the pertinent questions, yet often a seller's perception of a satisfactory, good, very good or excellent condition of a firearm can be far removed from that of the buyer. On receipt of the rifle the external pitting on the barrel was far greater and deeper than

I'd been led to believe, the stock had been heavily coated in varnish and the pistol grip cap had a light blue stone cap. My initial anticipation turned to real disappointment as the question 'what do I do now' dawned.

After a few minutes of pondering I removed the bolt and tentatively raised the barrel to the light and peered down. To my relief the rifling was very good - it had micro-groove rifling, even better for shooting accuracy, which pleased me greatly. Irrespective, whether they come with micro-groove or standard rifling, the Brno range of .22LR rimfire rifles are one of the most reliable and accurate rifles built.

Brno 22LRs remain in high demand and generally hold their price, their quality build going back to when the Zbrojovka Works in Brno, Czechoslovakia introduced the Model 1 .22LR calibre rimfire bolt rifle in 1945, followed by the Model 2 in '54 and Model 5 in '57. Those built between 1945 and 1967 in particular are considered the more favoured and a good condition Brno, depending on year of manufacture and originality, can fetch anything from \$600 to \$900 and even \$1200 for an exceptional example.

To generalise, the differences between the original Model 1, 2 and 5, which set



The rifle in component form.



Bore tapering towards end of the barrel for improved accuracy as shown by greater diameter of projectile to barrel.

the benchmark for sporting .22 rifle design and quality, the Model 1 has a fully open action at the top, barrel length of $22\frac{1}{2}$ ", a slight take-up crisp trigger and rear sight consisting of one standing and two folding iron leaves calibrated for 50, 75 and 100m.

The Model 2 has a semi-closed action at the top, longer $24\frac{1}{2}$ " barrel, direct crisp trigger, tangent rear sight with markings for ranges out to 300m and three gas ports on the receiver and bolt. Stated to be a refinement on the Model 1, opinion differs greatly.

The Model 5 is essentially a combination

of the 1 and 2 components having the longer Model 2 barrel and Model 1 rear iron leaf sight. Both have dovetail rails on the receiver for scope mounting and come with five or 10-shot detachable box metal magazine. Any of these models are a pleasure to shoot and worthy of ownership.

With regard to the stock, the thick varnish which didn't show in the website photographs actually ended up protecting the nicely-figured walnut stock beneath which drew me to it in the first place (many early models had a less attractive

but nonetheless very collectable pale yellow beechwood stock). Pitting on the barrel was a concern but in the end the positives, including its all-original condition, outweighed the negatives so I decided to keep it and apply my limited restoration skills.

Varnish-removal was applied in layers at intervals, carefully scraping away the wrinkled lacquer with a plastic card or spatula. After lightly sanding with fine grade paper and removing any dents and surface scratches, CCL finishing stock

Restoring that early model Brno .22LR



The groups shot with Winchester Power Points.

oil was applied by hand and the process repeated several times until the desired timber finish was achieved. Between layers of oil application the real work began removing the external barrel pitting. It took a good six to seven hours of hand rubbing using various grades of wet and dry paper to remove all the pitting and achieve a smooth finish suitable for bluing.

Adhering to the Birchwood bluing application instructions, it again took several coats before the desired bluing depth of colour was achieved, followed by a generous application of quality metal oil to protect and retain the bluing long term, not a task recommended for anyone, more for a gunsmith. When reassembled I couldn't have been happier with the result but the proof would be in the rifle's performance. Off to the range.

I mounted an inexpensive, used but in good condition Nykron 4x32 power scope on the Brno, bore sighted it in and took a selection of different brand .22LR bullets to see which would print the tightest group on paper, the target set at 50m. After six shots I had it hitting the target with CCI, Federal and Remington grouping well but the Winchester .22LR Power-Point (hollow-point) 42gr bullets with a velocity of 1320fps performed best, printing the tightest groups in the area of a five or 10c coin.

Notably, the Brno bore itself tapers

slightly towards the muzzle end so the bullet is squeezing out, further contributing to its fine accuracy. In this regard it's important the cleaning rod is inserted from the action end, not the muzzle end to avoid damaging the crown of the barrel, as such damage can result in the barrel needing cut back and recrowned by a gunsmith to restore or improve accuracy.

I was keen to try it on rabbits and was so confident in its performance that as long as a rabbit presented itself for a shot, I'd bag it. Eventually I found myself in rabbit country shouldering the lightweight, slick Brno and weaving my way through NSW saltbush territory. One rabbit, sitting partially outside the burrow with only its head and upright ears visible at about 50m was my first chance and, holding the cross-hair of the 4x scope steadily on its head, I squeezed the trigger.

At first it seemed I'd missed completely as the bullet threw up a puff of red dust to its left but there was a definite thud so a closer look was warranted. My mate Greg helped search the numerous warrens and located a spot of blood-matted soil outside one of holes, confirming a hit, but it managed to disappear down the hole and out of reach.

Two others at about 40m in more open ground away from their burrows were bagged soon after and small game then

succumbed to the Brno's accuracy in similar fashion. When you can group five shots in the size of a five or 10c piece at 50m, so long as you release a steady shot the Brno will do the job on intended game and if you come across a nice Brno .22LR of the era or even later, you'll have a hunting companion for life. ●



Sam with the first two rabbits taken with the Model 2.

Lithgow Museum back from the brink - for now

Dave Rose

The Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum, home to some of Australia's most treasured historical firearms, has been saved from having its collection rendered redundant. Bureaucratic red tape threatened to put the museum virtually out of business in November 2017, but the popular New South Wales facility has won a stay of execution after an appeal to the state's Minister for Police and Emergency Services, David Elliott.

The museum sits on the site once the domain of the Commonwealth Small Arms Factory, an Australian icon noted for its engineering prowess, and is one of the major tourist drawcards in the area. But the museum is not completely in the clear just yet. Having won a reprieve, the executive have been told they'll have to go through the whole process again in October when the museum permit comes up for renewal.

According to custodian Donna White things began to go wrong when Mr Elliott's predecessor, Troy Grant, was in charge in 2017. "The Police Minister of that time unilaterally signed off a change to the legislation regarding museum firearms, without understanding the impact it would have on museums," said Ms White.

That meant pistols, semi-automatics, all Category C and D firearms, prohibited firearms and handguns had to be permanently deactivated, a procedure which would have entailed plugging the barrels and welding them to the frame as well as welding all internal and external moving parts, meaning numerous iconic firearms would have been rendered useless and not worthy of being displayed.

It was at that point museum hierarchy decided to challenge the decision and



Worth fighting for: One of the Lithgow Museum displays.

launch an appeal, spurred on by overwhelming support from the general public and efforts of the Gunnedah Rural Museum who found themselves in a similar situation with their firearms display.

"The new Police Minister, Mr Elliott, took our concerns on board after the last New South Wales state election," said Ms White. "An amendment provision was put in place so we (and other museums) were able to apply for an exemption which, if granted, would be subject to a series of conditions."

The exemption was applied for last September and the amendment granted in January. But red tape still threatens to strangle the museum's future going forward as the ruling has to be reviewed every five years to be seen to be "reasonable in the circumstances". Sadly, this could simply boil down to the whims of the Police Commissioner or whichever minister is in control of the police portfolio at the time.

Ms White said the situation was far from ideal. "We're still not out of the woods," she said. "The exemption can be revoked at any time without reason and because of this we'll continue to fight and present arguments for museums to be exempt from the Act entirely."

Unless there's permanent change Ms

White fears smaller rural museums will simply ditch whatever firearms they have because of the hassle involved. And the museum's plight was echoed by Emma Taviani, Marketing and Communications Manager for SSAA (NSW) who said the reprieve was for now at least "a positive result".

She said the initial government legislation was impractical. "They wanted to make the guns unusable and lock up the barrels," said Ms Taviani. "The legislation would have permanently caused museums to shut and with it the valuable educational and historical value they offer. It defeats the purpose as people visit museums to learn and see artefacts in their real state."

The situation was summed up perfectly by Renzo Benedet, President of the Lithgow Small Arms Factory Museum. "In our specialty of firearms, many have little understanding of how museums operate and what they possess and some don't see past the end of a barrel," he said.

"To them, museum firearms are about gun control - that's it. A rather tenuous and irresponsible connection which brands museums as some 'gun happy' bunch. The misunderstanding is quite frightening." ●

The ultimate muzzleloading slug gun

Kim Atkinson



SA's Vlad Potezny used the rifle to good effect at the 2017 Muzzleloading National Championships in Perth.

Over the years I've built myself several muzzleloading rifles shooting long conical bullets but have been unhappy with their accuracy, even with aperture sights. In 2011 I acquired a large under-hammer action made by Fred Lotts in the US and also bought a heavy false muzzle barrel made by Rice Barrel Company in .40cal, 32" long, 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ " across the flats of an octagonal barrel with a 1:16 twist and false muzzle and locking collar. My preference for this came down to the fact I already have a black powder cartridge rifle in this calibre and twist which has proved very successful.

I decided to find out what the Americans had been doing as they'd been shooting this type of muzzleloading rifle for more than 150 years with great success, and on searching the internet for information came across an article on a website called black-powdermag.com. I contacted website host Larry Fletcher about an online article on 'slug guns'.

He told me the article was based on the Canal Fulton Ramrod Club in Ohio, who I contacted via 'snail mail' as they had no email address. A few weeks later I received two responses to my inquiry, the first from a member explaining his loading process, powder charge etc.

The other was from Bryan Berger who informed me he ran a small engineering business and could make all the tools I needed to shoot my slug gun. These included a bullet mould, hammer swage, paper patch cutter, crimping tool to crimp the base of the chase patch (a single wrap paper patch) and a wad punch.

I ordered the tools and about a month later they arrived and also in the package were cast and swaged bullets, the letter accompanying the goodies stating these were cast at 30:1 lead-tin. I noticed the bullets were tapered and of greater diameter at the base. As Australian slug gun shooters used parallel bullets predominately of bore diameter and cast in pure

lead, I emailed Mr Berger to check this out. He assured me this was the traditional style of bullet which has been shot in the US for 150 years and it would be difficult to load a hardened bullet one-thousand of an inch over groove diameter down the barrel.

It took me a while to become proficient in using the hammer swage - the cast bullet had a large dimple in the base which was driven into the body of the bullet to increase the diameter of the bullet by two-thou. I tried various lubricants in the swage to release the bullet after swaging - case lube and lanolin - the latter seemingly better until I was given a small amount of whale oil by a friend which proved best of the lot.

I tried various vegetable oils as a paper patch lubricant, rubbing the crimped paper patch on a piece of felt soaked with oil and once again the whale oil-soaked patches proved easier to load than the others I'd tried. Of the various types of paper Mr Berger supplied I eventually settled on 'freezer wrapping' as, even though fairly thick, it constantly shoots scores in the mid-90s and I wanted this rifle to shoot the best it could.

I went online again and came across a website named 'Historic Shooting' featuring a forum on muzzleloading slug guns. I asked the forum's slug gun shooters what type of paper was being used for patching and within 24 hours several respondents suggested the best option was 100 per cent cotton tracing paper, available from artist supply shops.

I tried several local shops but none could confirm the tracing paper they had in stock was 100 per cent cotton but once again the worldwide web came to the rescue as one of the slug gun shooters offered to buy me some (it comes in a pad). The paper proved vastly superior to what I'd been using and I was now shooting in the high 90s with even the occasional 100.

At my muzzleloading State Championships a while back, I lost a

cleaning patch down the barrel while cleaning - it actually happened twice - and by the time I finished clearing out the patches I'd run out of time to fire all my shots. I needed a way of reducing the time of loading and cleaning.

With a chase patch it's impossible to oil patches beforehand as can be done with a double wrapped patch which most long-range muzzleloaders use. I tried double wrapping but found with 1 1/3 thou thick paper (the thinnest I could find) loading was difficult so I needed to try something different.

Some time later I was re-reading old issues of *American Single Shot Journal* and in a 1991 issue came across an article entitled 'Choosing the right bullet mould'. The story covered traditional-style bullets used in the black powder cartridge era of 'schutzen shooting' and included the various styles of bullets used and dimensions of bullets relative to the groove and bore diameter of the barrel.

I looked up the Pope ML bullet for Pope muzzleloading rifles, a tapered bullet one to two-thou over groove diameter on the base band and one-thou over groove diameter on the nose band. Luckily I had some in my possession - the breach seating

bullets I use in my black powder cartridge rifle - and I had plenty already cast 1:30 tin-lead.

The following Saturday at the range I took 14 of these bullets to give them a try and ended up with a score of 99 - not bad - just as good as the paper patched bullets and a time saver as well. As the bullet had only four grease grooves, I ordered a custom-made nose-pour mould from the US with five grease grooves and a larger metplat as the cartridge rifle bullet was a semi-spitzer.

This bullet style has proved to be a winner, capable of shooting 100/100 with 10 shots on a regular basis provided I can read the wind and make the appropriate sight correction. On several occasions at club level I've shot 100/100 (13 shots, best 10 to count with no practice shots) at 200m and am now looking at trying a new style bullet, a 'postell' as used in long-range muzzleloading with an increased taper so I can shoot bullets harder than 1:30 tin-lead. I've shot 100/100 at 200m and expect the rifle to keep performing as well at 200m as it does at 100m. ●

Shooting high scores has become a regular occurrence.





SSAA female membership climbs 10 per cent

Nadia Isa

Olympic and Commonwealth medallist Laetisha Scanlan offers expert advice at one of last year's 'try shooting' days for women.

The Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia increased its female membership by more than 10 per cent in the 2019 calendar year. Last year, membership grew to the Association's highest number of female members thanks to initiatives at both state and national level.

SSAA national coaching and membership development manager and *Australian Women's Shooter* editor Gemma Dunn said the increase was due to several factors. "We're approaching membership development in a couple of different ways," Gemma said.

One of those was the 12-month trial of a new style of 'try-shooting' day in metropolitan and regional Victoria last year. The aim was for clubs and ranges to be better equipped in welcoming newcomers while building a greater sense of inclusivity and community spirit among those who had never picked up a firearm before.

"We're working with clubs to help them develop plans to increase membership and bring a lot more ladies through the doors," Gemma said. "We find a lot of women respond positively to a sense of community."

The program was so successful that SSAA Victoria decided to implement its own version as a permanent fixture this

year with the *Women on Target* events having kicked-off at the end of March at SSAA's Eagle Park Range in Little River.

SSAA (Vic) director and SSAA Wodonga president Josh Knight said they had introduced various initiatives to encourage more novice shooters to attend ranges. "We've made a Nerf gun target range for youngsters, manned by our volunteers, and are in the process of developing an archery section for children and parents to have fun together," Mr Knight said.

"We found the best way to encourage ladies, juniors and new shooters is to have a welcoming and positive environment for them to learn in, which encourages them to bring others along too. We also hold an annual school shooting competition and work with a local biathlon club."

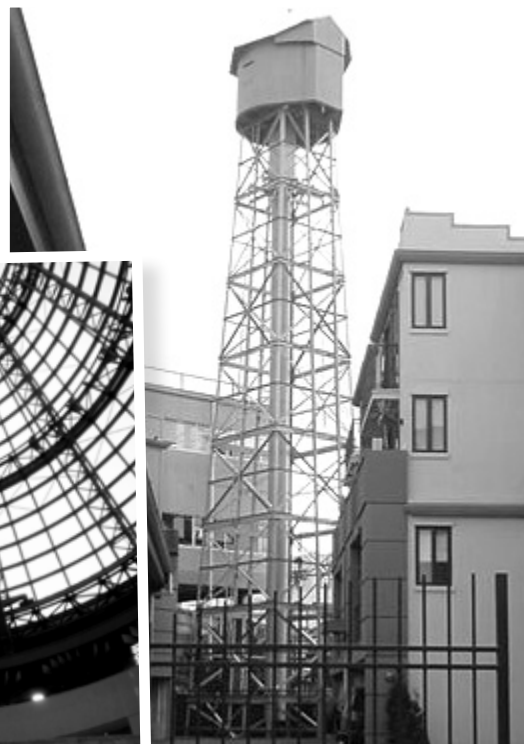
Gemma said the increase is evidence SSAA's initiative has been successful so far. "This is what we want to happen and it shows the need for programs like this," she said.

As well as try-shooting days, ranges also hold events for experienced shooters. SSAA Rockhampton in Queensland supported a highly successful Women of Shooting promotional event to celebrate women in shooting. Coordinated and sponsored by The Outpost Arms and Munitions, this two-day event marked International Women's Day and saw

Olympic and world champion shooters take part. But it's not just women the Association is targeting. SSAA National has also been developing coaching accreditation to help clubs improve the experience for new members and potential shooters. "We're not just looking for women to try shooting but juniors as well - really anyone who's interested in the sport," Gemma said.

She said accreditation was just another way to build the number of shooters in Australia. "We're trying to find a better way to appeal to all types of potential members including men, women and juniors. This isn't to separate women from men but to encourage more women to participate. Women are an untapped resource - they make up only about 10 per cent of the membership so we're trying to find a way to be more inclusive of everyone."

SSAA National President Geoff Jones said the Association is proud to be leading the way for women in what has historically been regarded a male-dominated sport. "The success of the many SSAA programs and initiatives for women throughout Australia is evidenced by the significant growth in female membership and active participation in all aspects of our great sport and the leadership roles women are now sharing," he said. "SSAA not only talks about equality, we make it happen." ●



Shot towers of the trans-Tasman

Lionel Swift

While researching an article on the Ballantine Ammunition Company, the only one still manufacturing shot in Australia (*Shooter*, October 2019), I became aware of the fascinating history of lead shot-making in 19th century British colonies.

High-quality lead shot has always necessitated a tower and these were built of various materials and to different heights. There were seven towers throughout Australia - Sydney (2), Melbourne (4), Hobart and

one in Mount Eden, New Zealand. The Ballantine (ex-ICI) Tower was the only one built in the 20th century. Technically, shot production using the tower method requires a minimum of 50m height to yield BB-sized shot, the largest which can be reliably created by the high-drop method.

Victoria
Ballantine Tower (ex-ICI/IMI Ltd)
This is of structural grade steel construction and 55m (180ft) high. It was built by

ICI based on their tower in Birmingham, England and bought by the Ballantine Ammunition Company which moved it from Deer Park to North Altona in the 1970s. It's the only tower still operating in Australia or NZ and the quality is such that other ammunition companies, some international, are loyal customers.

Another unique feature is the 4-tonne capacity lift which services the tower to its 55m peak. Most lead shot contains antimony, an expensive addition,





to increase the hardness and Ballantine shot has 10 per cent which is among the highest level. Shot-making also uses a small amount of arsenic to facilitate the flow through sieves before dropping.

Clifton Hill Tower

This brick structure at 77.6m (254ft) was built in 1882 for Richard Hodgson who operated the shot tower originally then sold it to Alfred Harber and Simon Hughes. It was taken over by Walter Coops in 1896, adding to the capacity of his central Melbourne tower.

Its construction, incorporating an artistic design in brick pattern and windows, makes it quite ornate although currently the view is somewhat spoiled by untidy surrounds and graffiti. Originally it was more than 80m high which included the smelting unit and chimney, but these were removed after production ceased.

It's believed to be the highest shot tower built in the world and is visible for miles in

several directions from where it stands at the eastern end of Alexandra Parade near the tunnel entrance of the Eastern Freeway and is used as a landmark by pilots taking a southern approach to Essendon Airport.

Sadly there's no collection of artefacts or museum at this site and it's not open to the public. The tower operated until 1947 when the Coops family company continued shot production only from their Latrobe Street address.

Collingwood Tower (gone but not quite forgotten)

This early shot tower, the first in the colony of Victoria, was built for Louis Hamel in Sackville Street, Collingwood in 1878 but didn't produce for long, being superseded in height and capacity by the Clifton Hill Tower. It was later demolished.

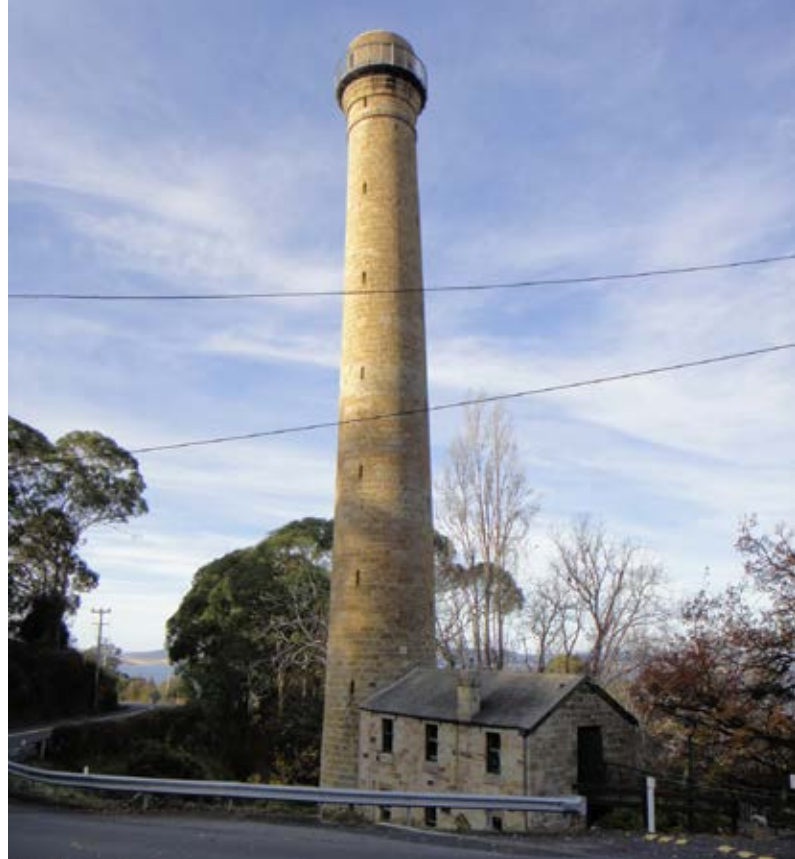
Coops Tower, Melbourne CBD

This is difficult to find despite being heritage listed in 'Melbourne Central', a large

shopping centre. It can be viewed from the front of the R. M. Williams store and entrance to the base of the tower - and 'shot tower museum' - which is in that store. Entry is free and worthwhile. A side elevation of the tower can be viewed from the next level of the complex.

This tower, built in 1895, is 50m (164ft) high, made of local red bricks and of rectangular construction, making it distinctly different from most stone or brick shot towers which were generally circular. It remained in production until 1965. There are 327 wooden steps, in flights of 20 or so, leading to the top.

It was built by Walter Coops after he moved into Little Church Street (later renamed Knox Place) and demolished three existing houses to erect the shot tower and factory. A heavy steel cable and pulley system was used to lift lead to the top where it was melted and this system was mechanised with an electric motor, probably in the 1950s.



L-R: Ballantine Tower; Clifton Hill Tower; Front view of Coops Tower and photo of Walter Coops in the tower museum; Tarooma Tower and the integrated factory in Tasmania.

Display boards and drawings show the manufacturing process and shot quality testing incline tables had only one gap between two sloping plates compared with the current Ballantine which has seven sloping glass tables, ensuring extremely high-quality shot.

When the tower was built 'around and over' by the Melbourne Central complex in 1974, it was housed within a tapering steel and glass cone enclosure, a handsome addition to the heritage listed structure. The whole project incorporates the original brick factory and tower and the factory has become a large R. M. Williams store, public access to the tower available through the store and encouraged. A small museum is included with free entry.

Tasmania Tarooma Tower

This stands a few kilometres south of Hobart CBD and is extremely picturesque, being built of sandstone and combining

a three-storey factory into its base. Construction was completed by Joseph Moir in 1887 with the assistance of two stonemasons and shot production began in September that year.

The height is 60m (197ft) and the walls are 860cm thick at the base. Immediately behind this structure is a sandstone house of considerable beauty, also built by Moir both as a residence and to 'practise the art' of sandstone building before embarking on the tower. The large property originally extended to the shoreline cliffs on the River Derwent where Moir built another sandstone edifice - a circular mausoleum - where he and his wife and daughter were buried before later being reinterred in a cemetery at Sandy Bay.

The shot-making museum displays some 19th century firearms and items from the original tower and factory, access to museum and tower being free via the café though a small fee is charged to climb the tower.

The shot testing incorporated a greater

number of sloping glass tables than most contemporary processes, hence increasing the quality. Moir, somewhat ahead of his time, also added arsenic to the molten lead to improve the flow.

NSW Hancock's Tower

Robert Hancock built one of the first shot towers in Australia on George Street, Sydney between 1840 and 1849 to a height of 60m (196ft) which was demolished in 1894. He was known as a private person and constructed an observation tower at the top to entertain his guests. Originally a wheelwright, Hancock later became a publican and built a hotel near the shot tower. A statue he commissioned of himself for his George Street garden was later moved to his gravesite at Rookwood Cemetery.

Many romantic myths circulated as to the purpose of the tower, the most common being the builder put it up as a prison for his wife. But Hancock



Shot towers of the trans-Tasman

was a shrewd, hard-working wheelwright who had his 'smithy' at the intersection of George and Market Streets. Hancock was also a firm believer in the adage that 'an Englishman's home is his castle' and, having made considerable money at his trade, he built a watchtower as part of his residence to deter would-be thieves.

Glebe Tower

This one, near the railway line in the Sydney suburb of Glebe, was made of rendered brick and was 58m (190ft) high. It formed part of the Glebe Lead Works which also had a 150ft chimney on site. The shot tower was built in 1884 and demolished in 1955.

New Zealand

This tower was built for the Colonial Ammunition Company (CAC) at Mount Eden near Auckland and was operated by a Mr Lylie who previously made shot in his own business by a casting process. CAC NZ was formed in 1885 by Major John Whitney and W.H. Hazard and taken over by ICI around 1960.

The tower was 30m (99ft) of light steel construction and lead ingots were raised to the top in a lift. The plant ceased production in 1980 and the tower is heritage

listed. The site is owned by a developer in liquidation who has already built several large domestic buildings there. The tower itself was listed for sale (December 2019) and it's hoped a new owner will restore it or at least arrange public viewing.

A Melbourne connection via NZ

After establishing the Mount Eden factory, CAC Australia was formed and an ammunition and explosives factory built on the west bank of the Maribyrnong River. This, like the NZ factory, produced both civil and military ammunition and explosives but no shot, therefore no tower. It was closed and mostly demolished when the Australian Government established a more modern plant (Commonwealth Ammunition Factory) close by about the time of World War One. Two large bluestone structures were retained by the Commonwealth Government and are heritage listed today. The Commonwealth factory was demolished in the 1990s and the only other building is the administrative block on Gordon Street. ●



CAC Tower at Mount Eden.

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This glass is all class

Zeiss Victory V8 4.8-35x60

Daniel O'Dea



The scope has a stout but proportioned look compared to similar premium long-range optics.

Over the years I've been lucky enough to review and even own some pretty high-end European glass, some of the best riflescopes I've used coming from German manufacturer Zeiss although most of the examples I've owned have been from their Austrian rivals.

Formed in 1846 in Jena, Germany, Carl Zeiss is now a major player in the optical and opto-electronic industries. The figures are staggering. With production plants in almost 50 countries employing more than 30,000 people, the company's revenue in fiscal year 2018 exceeded \$US5.8 billion - about 9.3 billion Aussie dollars.

Lifestyle items such as scopes and binoculars are actually the smallest contributor to that figure, the majority coming from industrial and medical technologies such as microscopes and other machines for hospital surgeries and laboratories as well as equipment used in the creation of microchips. Either way we're talking about a company on the cutting edge of developing expertise.

When I reviewed the Lithgow LA105 Woomera for *Australian Shooter* last year, Outdoor Sporting Agencies, distributor for Lithgow Arms and Zeiss, sent me a scope for the review, not just any old scope but a top of the range Zeiss Victory V8 4.8-35x60.

Considered the benchmark in the Victory V8 line, it offers 35x magnification combined with the Zeiss ASV Competition Bullet Drop Compensator (BDC) for the 'ultimate in long-distance shot excellence'. I was suitably impressed with it while reviewing the Woomera so felt it deserved closer inspection in its own right.

Out of the box the Victory V8 4.8-35x60 is a noticeably large riflescope, its thick 36mm main tube dominated by three hefty turrets at the centre with top and right turrets controlling elevation and windage and the left one for parallax adjustment. This last turret also houses a single 2032 battery to power the illumination system.

This glass is all class

At one end of the main tube is the eyepiece which at 46mm diameter would serve well in size as an objective lens on most scopes. This also carries an on/off rotary button dial to control the illumination brightness of the red dot at the centre of the reticle. At the other end is the massive 60mm objective lens with outside diameter of 67mm. Overall length is 402mm which gives the whole package a stout but proportioned look against many other long-range optics.

The purpose of these proportions is to deliver a scope with excellent light transmission, quoted at 92 per cent but with all the quantities to produce the necessary brightness to enable accurate long-range shots, at high magnification settings, in low light.

For the optical tech heads out there, the exit pupil measures 9.9mm at 4.8x while still 1.4mm at the highest magnification of 35x (a sizeable exit pupil aids fast target acquisition). Likewise, twilight factor measures 13.6 and 45.8 respectively, lowest to highest magnification. Eye relief is generous at 95mm and there's available diopter adjustment of +2/-3.5. Naturally the scope also features the very best of Zeiss market-leading lens and coatings.

As expected with such a long-range scope, the elevation turret carries a generous adjustment range equalling 130cm at 100m or about 57 MOA. The lateral adjustment turret has a total range of 85cm for windage and of equal value is the fine adjustment graduations of a mere 5mm per click at 100m equivalent to just 1/6 MOA.

Although many shooters may not be able to even hold 5mm at 100m, this micro adjustment comes in handy for fine tweaks at extreme distance where, say at 1000m, the same one click equals 50mm. Speaking of fine adjustment, it's worth noting the illuminated dot at the centre of the reticle is claimed to be 'the finest illuminated dot in the world that features a subtension the size of a two-cent coin at a distance of 1000m'.

But in what currency does that claim relate to? We haven't had a two-cent coin since 1992 and the US dumped it in 1873. I'd say it's a safe bet that based on Zeiss' German heritage it's the two-cent Euro coin which is 18.75mm wide, a fairly tiny dot at 1000m. In more cutting-edge technology an intelligent motion sensor system automatically activates the dot as soon as the rifle is raised to take aim, turning it off when lowered.

One of the main features is the Zeiss ASV Competition BDC system. In basic terms the scope comes with nine additional ballistic turret rings which can be swapped out on the elevation turret, and

Elevation and windage turrets are self-locking and pull out to rotate for adjustment.



The elevation turret removed and stripped to components. Two extra ballistic rings are shown to illustrate where they go in the stack.



The rotary button dial controls illumination with a red dot the size of a two-cent coin at 1000m.



Once the zero stop is set there's no need to remove the whole turret to swap out the ballistic rings.

after sighting in at 100m use the supplied ballistic tables to choose a ring that best matches the ballistics of your rifle's calibre and load.

The specific ring, rather than have equidistant increment markings based on the value of each click, is specifically scaled for that calibre's trajectory and numbered for zero at 100m intervals out to 400m or 600m depending on how flat the trajectory is for the chosen calibre ring. Each 100m graduation is quartered for marked 25m increments and further broken down to apparent 5m rises.

So once you've estimated distance to target, rather than have to work out how many clicks to adjust for elevation, you dial straight to the distance - if it's 400m you dial straight to '4' (representing 400m) on the ballistic ring. If it's 450m, you dial halfway between the '4' and '5'. As expected on a scope of this ilk the elevation turret also has a stop feature, so once zeroed and set you can't dial back to below your 100m zero.

If you have a custom load or calibre and wish to shoot a distance past 600m,

according to the manual Zeiss offer a service where they can engrave you a ring to match your rifle's ballistics out to 1000m (if the ballistics are suitable). This is an additional cost.

One thing that's apparent is the whole focus of the Zeiss Victory V8 4.8-35x60 not to produce merely another long-range target or tactical-style scope, rather deliver arguably the world's premier long-range hunting scope. This would be why the ASV Bullet Drop Compensator is more focused around maximum 400m or 600m ranges which most might consider the absolute limit of ethical hunting distances.

At the range the scope was a delight to use with precise, direct adjustments and brightness along with clarity beyond any cliché I can think of. The only possible downside is, like the best of any premium product, many may find the cost somewhat debilitating. With an RRP pushing past \$4000 it literally costs four times more than my first car but this in no way means it's not good value and it's certainly not alone in that price bracket.

It definitely falls into that 'buy right,

buy once' category and will give a lifetime of premium service should your budget extend that far. So if you can afford to splash the cash for one of the best hunting scopes money can buy, the Zeiss Victory V8 will not disappoint. ●

Specifications

Magnification: 4.8-35x
Effective lens diameter: 48.1-60mm
Exit pupil diameter: 9.9-1.4mm
Eye relief: 95mm (3.74")
Vertical adjustment range at 100m: 130cm
Lateral adjustment range at 100m: 85cm
Adjustment click at 100m: 0.5cm
Centre tube diameter: 36cm
Eyeiece tube diameter: 46mm
Objective tube diameter: 67cm
Length: 402mm (15.8")
Weight (without inner rail): 970g (34.2oz)
Weight (with inner rail): 1000g (35.3oz)

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The four-shot riflescope ZERO

Mike Smith

Zeroing a rifle is the process of adjusting the sights so the projectile strikes the target as close as possible to the point of aim. It's a basic job which most shooters do, or at least check, on a regular basis though it's not uncommon to see someone expending large amounts of ammunition - and generating a lot of frustration - during the procedure, especially when a new rifle/scope combination is being zeroed. This article explains a step-by-step process which typically can have a new rifle zeroed at two different distances using just four rounds of ammunition.

Preparation

Assuming you already have the scope correctly mounted on the rifle, you need two sheets of card - I use the back of old SSAA 25/50m 3P rimfire targets - and some of the ammunition for which you want to obtain zero.

If you intend to zero at two distances - say for example 100m and 200m - you'll need to know the ballistic characteristics of the ammunition, specifically the distance which the projectile will drop vertically between the distances. A few round target patches about 20mm in diameter make life easier though a black heavy felt tip pen will assist.

You'll need access to a suitable shooting range which has bench rests and some type of front and rear rifle supports, solid rests or sandbags. If there are no benches the exercise can be done from the prone

position. Finally, it can be helpful if you have some idea of what sort of precision or group size you expect the rifle to achieve.

Step 1

Stick one of your target patches in the centre of a piece of card and fix it to a target board at a distance of 25m. This is where a lot of folk go wrong as I've seen shooters start the zeroing process at 50m or more and have watched someone attempt an initial zero with a \$10,000 F Class at 300m. It didn't go well.

At 25m you can be almost certain to be

on the cardboard with the first shot. Failing to do that usually results in lots of irritation as the scope adjustment or point of aim is wound up and down, left and right while trying to see if the projectile is missing high or low and/or left or right.

Step 2

The next move is to bore sight the rifle/scope combination. There are an array of gadgets, usually using a laser, which can be employed but they're not essential. Firstly check the scope's Adjustable Objective (AO) or side focus, if it has one, is set for the correct distance ie, 25m as this will reduce any parallax errors. Also remove any covers on the scope adjustment turrets.

Set up the rifle on the rest with bolt removed and firearm pointing at the target. Look through the action, down the barrel and alter the position of the rifle until you can see the black target patch right in the centre of the bore. This may sound tricky but it's usually not difficult.

Once you have a good picture try not to disturb the rifle's position - your rest has to be able to keep the rifle stable without you holding it. Look through the scope, being careful not to move the rifle, and you should see the target card with the reticle situated some distance away from the patch. In my case the zero was being checked after mounting a 6.5 Creedmoor barrelled action into a new stock so the initial zero wasn't far off.

Without moving the rifle, tweak the elevation up/down and windage left/right





on the scope until the reticle is centred on the target patch. Note that with most modern scopes modifying the turrets actually moves the image while the reticle remains centred.

You may find the scope settings need to be moved in the opposite direction to what you assume. If the reticle is for example above the target patch, the scope will need to be adjusted “Up” to correct the error, similarly if the reticle is to the right, the scope must be changed to “Right”.

In my case the reticle was low and slightly left of the patch so I had to amend the scope “Down” and “Left” to put the reticle over the patch. If you do accidentally move the rifle while doing this, go back and check you still have the correct view, through the barrel.

Step 3

Now you’re actually able to shoot. Taking all the normal safety precautions, replace the bolt in the rifle and load and fire a round while carefully aiming at the target patch. If you’ve been methodical in Step 2 you should find the projectile has struck the cardboard close to the patch (in my experience it’s not unusual to actually hit it). In this example the result was about 30mm low and a touch left, close enough as we’re on the cardboard with one shot.

If the projectile has struck more than 50mm from the patch then something isn’t right and needs to be fixed. Going back a step and checking the bore sighting would be the first thing to do.

Step 4

We’re going to move to a more normal distance for the calibre of rifle being zeroed. For a low velocity calibre such as a 22LR, 50m is probably appropriate and for a higher velocity calibre 100m would be the standard next stage.

It was convenient for me to use a standard SSAA 100m CF target. Again, taking all your safety precautions and after adjusting any scope parallax settings to the new distance, load and fire a round while aiming at the mark on your target.

If all is well the projectile will have hit

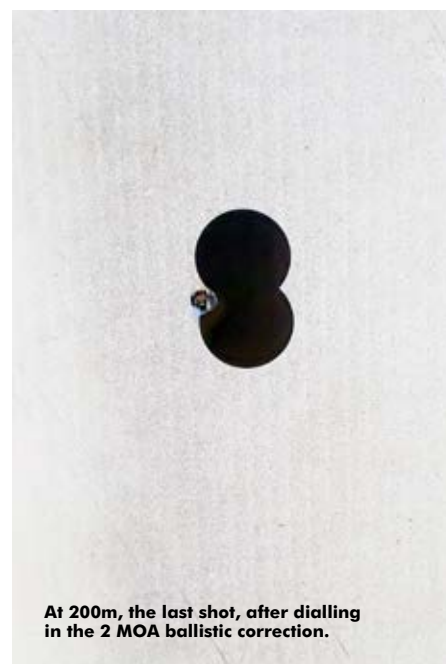
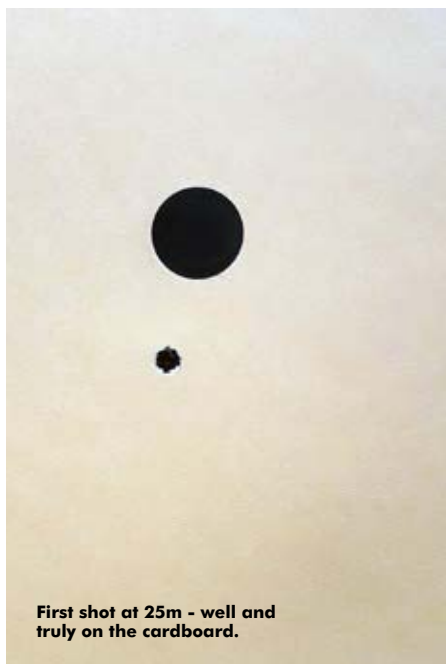
the target and its point of impact is clear (my first round at this distance was close to the point of aim, just inside the 10 ring). I should say this accuracy is higher than I might typically expect at this stage which is due to the fact that, based on previous experience with this rifle, I’d already wound in 6 Minutes of Arc (MOA) of “Up” elevation from the setting used at 25m.

Step 5

We need to fiddle with the scope to correct whatever zeroing error exists at this distance and there are several



The four-shot riflescope zero



ways of doing this, none of them without their pitfalls.

A: Estimate the distance between the point of aim and point of impact and adjust the scope elevation and windage to correct the error. This involves making the estimate in millimetres and converting that to MOA before modifying the scope. This conversion might be challenging. In addition the turret calibration of your scope may not be accurate as, for example, dialling in 1 MOA might not accurately move the image exactly 1 MOA. Also, sometimes fine-tuning a scope's elevation setting can have an effect on the windage and vice versa.

B: You can make a guess at the new settings and wind them in to your scope, take another shot and move on. You'll get there in the end but it could be frustrating.

C: Aim the rifle so the reticle is again over the mark. Carefully, without moving

the rifle, adjust the scope settings until the reticle is over the place where the projectile struck the target. As before, you'll find you need to move the settings in the opposite direction to what you might think and while this can be tricky, when done well it should see you close to a good zero with one more shot.

Step 6

Assuming you used method C, fire another round at the aiming mark. You should be on target. My third shot was not as far right as I expected, which indicates maybe I moved the rifle while adjusting the scope. But I'd only expect this rifle to shoot a 1 MOA group which at 100m is about 29mm so the shot was within that expected group size and close enough.

At this point many people make the mistake of firing more rounds, one at a

time and making corrections after each shot. If you do want to go further then statistical analysis indicates you'll need to shoot at least a 10-shot group then mathematically calculate the centre of the group and make corrections.

Step 7

The range I was using gave me the option of shooting out to 200m. Using my ballistics computer program I'd checked the expected projectile drop between 100m and 200m for the ammunition I was using. It was predicted to be 2.1 MOA so I dialled 2 MOA into the scope, reset the parallax and fired a round at a 200m target. The result was pleasing and in less than 20 minutes with four rounds of ammunition I had a good solid zero at 100m and 200m. ●



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The flintlock in profile with the name SHARPE clearly stamped just in front of the hammer.

Look Sharpe

English flintlock a tasty find

Mark van den Boogaart

With the launch of a new antique arms show in Brisbane, it goes without saying it was a priority event for me. Pleasingly, the display had a good number of stallholders with a mix of aged and militaria items. Even better, not only did the larger dealers have some interesting exhibits for sale, so did the smaller operators with many offering an eclectic assortment of antique arms among a wider array of more general collectables.

I was on the lookout for another flintlock pistol. During the previous 12 months I'd been following a clear nautical theme with the purchase of a French cutlass and English boarding axe, so was searching for

a flintlock to suit. As sometimes happens, over that same period I'd run down a couple of false leads but was confident of my chances.

Luck seemed to be on my side as not too long after arriving I spotted some nice English flintlocks. While the military, or more correctly British Army guns were okay, the civilian pieces were impressive and among them was a reasonably priced brass-barrelled gun. While not always the case, brass barrels were often associated with sea service as they gave protection against salt water and sea spray, so I was on the right track.

During the 18th and 19th centuries the British Empire was in an almost constant

state of war, readiness for conflict and aggressive expansion. Empire building required a lot of things, firearms included, so the British gun trade was booming with little sign of bust on the horizon.

Major companies competed for trade to supply the Empire's forces while others sought to sell direct to officers in the service of king and country and consequently guns of all types were marketed to prospective buyers. These guns - and more collectively the cutlasses, sabres and others manufactured for sale - were known as private purchase arms. As the name implies those who could afford, or were expected to, bought their arms privately. These may have been improved



The Sharpe flintlock with brass barrel.

versions of existing service options, true one-off pieces designed to demonstrate the owner's wealth and privilege, or examples that sat somewhere in between.

The brass-barrelled pistol which caught my eye was of the latter, an obvious private manufacture aimed squarely at the naval services. Built to attract the up-and-coming

young officer, its lock mechanism was of a military design while the plain timber stock was enhanced with good quality, decorative brass fittings, some fancy scroll work on the barrel and a brass-tipped ramrod.

Looking the pistol over in detail it displayed the usual dings and dents of an item more than 200 years old. Measuring

370mm in length with a 230mm .54 calibre barrel it was standard sea service in dimension, obviously English, well made, complete and in functioning order. It carried the name Sharpe on the lockplate along with Birmingham proof marks indicating a post-1813 build. The barrel also carried some decoration and a 'London' stamp. Having bought such pistols before I assumed it was a Birmingham pistol with a 'London' stamp rather than the other way round.

On letting the moths out my wallet I had myself an English, private purchase sea service flintlock so that was bingo for me and once home it was time to begin the research process. Good gun books make this a much simpler task and the encyclopaedic *British Gunmakers* by Nigel Brown is my 'go-to' reference. While both Sharp and Sharpe were common in Birmingham and London, the proof mark along the with gun's design helped me identify John Sharpe, whose firearms works operated under that name from 1811 to 1817 in Edmund St, Birmingham.

The Sharpes, of whom John is considered by some as the patriarch, were prolific gunmakers and engravers in Birmingham and possibly London and it seems John Sharpe was not only the first of what would be a multi-generational family industry, but a savvy business operator and entrepreneur to boot.

Much of his trade focused on the export market which he took advantage of through his unique 'Extra' approach, guns made for the Americas, Europe and possibly Australia being stamped with 'Extra Sharpe



The clear Birmingham proof marks, along with a decorative pattern on the barrel and a small, ornate brass plate on the reverse side of the lock.

Proof' on the barrel. Sometimes incorrectly referred to as trade pistols, Extra Sharpe Proof-marked guns are still reasonably common on auction house websites. In real terms the 'Extra' meant nothing much at all though it did sound impressive.

Another aspect of John's business approach appears to have included using Belgium-assembled firearms. As with the Extra Sharpe Proof guns there are currently a number carrying Birmingham and Liege (Belgium) proof marks for sale at auction. It's unclear if Sharpe supplied the parts, used generic English gun parts or even Belgian equivalents, though what is known is they're often of lesser quality, especially in assembly and finish. Interestingly, most of the Extra Sharpe Proof and Belgian guns I viewed online are shorter than my latest purchase.

Then there's the 'London' stamp on a Birmingham-proofed gun and again, why the word London appears on the barrel is difficult to really pin down. One theory is, like the use of Belgian-made guns, the Birmingham industry was used to meet increasing demand for London guns.

Another theory relates more to marketing and prestige. The practice of stamping 'London' on the barrel may well reflect the fact that during the 18th and 19th centuries London was really the



The brass tipped ramrod, likely a later replacement, but it was well matched to the pistol.

centre of the universe, like Rome during the days of the Empire. A 'London' stamp was a wise marketing ploy as any gun with such a moniker could immediately demand a higher price, so much so that some Birmingham manufacturers were known to have established shop fronts and sell London-branded Birmingham guns in the equivalent of what we'd now regard as a retail outlet.

In considering it all, it would appear my Sharpe-built pistol is of Birmingham origin and as it doesn't carry the words Extra Sharpe Proof is probably an older variant intended for the domestic market so is quite possibly 202-plus years old. More importantly it's a cracker of a pistol, a fine example of an English sea service flintlock and a welcome addition to my collection. ●

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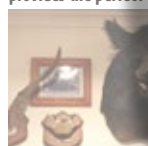
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A photograph showing two wild boars in a dry, open landscape with scattered trees and shrubs. The ground is light brown and dusty. The boars are dark-colored and are walking towards the left. The background is filled with more trees and a clear sky.

Boar run spans dry season dams

Dick Eussen

I was caretaking a 2200sq/km station, something I do while the owner/manager is on leave as it provides me with a place to hunt and fish. It's easy work taking care of dogs, chooks, pigs and other animals as well as watering lawns and patrolling the boundaries to ensure cattle duffers and trespassers are kept at bay. I generally do it on my own and amuse myself by fishing in the 73km river frontage, hunting pigs and wildlife photography. Life's hard . . .

But this time I was joined by old mate Wayne Peacock, so I'd someone to talk to. The dry season was well advanced and with dams evaporating quickly we had high hopes of shooting some good pigs. The wet season had been a failure as the station only received 350mm of rain instead of the annual 500mm, so dam levels were worrying for the manager as cattle can't exist without water.

Our first task was to set the cherabin pots in the river which was still flowing strongly. Cherabin are big freshwater prawns that can grow to 90cm though average about 30cm and offer a welcome

change from beef. We checked a couple of dams en route but most signs were old wallows. Pigs wallow in dams and create mud holes that bog down cattle so it's easy to see why they're not welcome.

Wayne was armed with his trusty Remington slide-action rifle in .308W while I was road-testing my Sako Finnlight, also in .308W and fitted with a new Leupold VX.R 4-12x50 30mm tube scope and I'd reloaded 30 Winchester cases with Nosler 150gr AccuBond projectiles. Due to the lack of time in selecting a purpose-load for the Sako, I loaded a random charge of 45.5gr of ADI AR2208 and CCI rifle primer - one grain below the recommended maximum. I'm happy to report the loads averaged 20mm in three-shot clusters and the shot pigs died on the spot so I'm sticking with it.

We approached a dam making sure the wind was blowing in our faces, walking the dam wall to check out some thick rubber vines the pigs love to sleep in. A shot rang out and on the other side of the wall Wayne was pulling from the water a pig which had been feeding on lilies. When it spotted him it pig-paddled to shore, Wayne waiting until

it reached land before shooting, but it rolled back into the drink. It was a fair-sized and well-fed boar and that was it for the day.

Up with the larks

Rising before daylight, on the first dam we saw the bum-end of a large boar vanishing rapidly into the woodlands, the wind carrying the sound of my new ute. Our normal method is to park several hundred metres away and walk in, especially if the dam's surrounded by thick timber.

The next one was almost dry with cattle milling about a feed trough but no pigs. I headed back and was putting the Sako away when I was startled by two rapid shots. I drove down and saw Wayne standing on the dam wall and about 80m away, in the dried-out bed at the dam's rear, lay the black body of a big boar. Wayne was elated.

We covered almost 100km that day, checking more than 20 of the property's 35 dams and even walking several kilometres under the paperbarks that shade the river, but no pigs. This was in sharp contrast to six years ago when I started hunting on the block and shot up to 30 a day.

Constant hunting by us and a few others, coupled with lean drought years, has resulted in a sharp decline in pig numbers. Unlike many other hunters who are only after big boars, we shoot all porkers - boars, sows and piglets. It's something land-owners want hunters to do or they may not find themselves welcome again if they become selective and hunt just for trophies. Pig hunting is about pest control.

As we drove we crossed a small drying wallow beside a steep dry creek crossing - a pig was using it on a regular basis. On the way back I slowed down and yes, there he was happily slumming it in the mud. I jumped out and grabbed the Sako as it headed up the steep bank at a slow pace. He never made it as the 150gr Nosler AccuBond stopped him in his tracks.

Final day

Our cherabin pots were working better than our hunting efforts and we enjoyed a great feed of prawns. We've found that being in the field early when pigs are still feeding is the best plan so, on our last day, we were at the first dam before daylight, planning an almost complete circuit of the station.

I pulled up at a big dam, Wayne walking the top while I ventured into the vine thicket fringe of the creek below. I



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Boar run spans dry season dams

heard rustling and waited for a rush of hogs but there was nothing until a big black shape burst out in full gallop and vanished over the bank in front of me, the brush making it impossible to take an accurate shot on the biggest boar I'd seen in years.

By midday we'd covered many miles. Wayne shot a nice boar wallowing in a dam and we had high hopes for the next dam as it was similar in make-up with lots of vine on and below the wall. Like others it was in an advanced state of evaporation with a herd of cattle resting under a shady spot to the rear.

I saw the flicker of an ear below the wall, pulled up and grabbed the Sako. Some 20m below me a pig was making its way slowly down the slope, partly hidden by vines and bushes. He had to cross a small clearing where I had a good view of him and as he walked into it I took the pressure on the trigger when a rifle shot from nearby startled him into a rush. My own shot was a little too far back though I picked him up as he reappeared in a small gap, missed again but the next shot took him down.

Sometimes strange things happen like pigs walking to a dam in full sight as they had done days back. This time Wayne's shot startled me as much as it had the pig, it was so sudden and unexpected being only 20m away. "Did you have to finish my pig off?" I called out. "Not sure," said Wayne, "he was laying on some dead timber below me. I saw an ear twitch so I shot him."

I walked past him and saw the pig I'd shot about 25m ahead, partly hidden by scrub, both big young boars, possibly brothers. Why Wayne's boar hadn't fled when I opened fire almost over the top of it we'll never know but, as I say, strange things happen when hunting.

The one certainty was my new Sako Finnlight had worked well, a pleasure to carry and use in the warming conditions of the wet season build-up. ●



Wayne shot this big boar while it was napping by a dam.

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Gun & Knife Show List

2020

April 4-5	The Betting Hall, Elwick Showgrounds, Hobart	Antique & modern firearms, edged weapons and militaria	Phil Gourlay 0477 411 457
April 4-5	Exhibition Display Pavilion, Ipswich Showgrounds	Queensland Knife Show	andrew@knifeartassociation.com
May 16-17	Sydney International Shooting Centre at Cecil Park	Sydney Gun Show	Lachlan Matthews events@sydneygunshow.com.au 0408 695 036
May 23-24	Toowoomba Showgrounds, Glenvale Rd, Toowoomba	350+ tables firearms, ammo, militaria & collectibles	Dan Watson 0407 643 776
June 13-14	Exhibition Grounds, Southside, Gympie, Qld	Gympie Arms & Collectables Fair	Gordon MacRae 0428 865 205 syd.gmac1@gmail.com
July 18-19	Belmont Shooting Complex, Belmont	Brisbane Show of modern, sporting, military guns, militaria, edged weapons, collectables	Paul Brush 0412 562 252
August 15-16	Sydney International Shooting Centre at Cecil Park	Sydney Gun Show	Lachlan Matthews events@sydneygunshow.com.au 0408 695 036
September 12-13	Toowoomba Showgrounds, Glenvale Rd, Toowoomba	350+ tables firearms, ammo, militaria & collectibles	Dan Watson 0407 643 776
September 12-13	Cannington Exhibition Centre & Showgrounds, Cannington	WA Arms & Armour Annual Militaria Fair	Geoff Smith 0419 955 284
October 17-18	Belmont Shooting Complex, Belmont	Brisbane Show of modern, sporting, military guns, militaria, edged weapons, collectables	Paul Brush 0412 562 252
November 14-15	Sydney International Shooting Centre at Cecil Park	Sydney Gun Show	Lachlan Matthews events@sydneygunshow.com.au 0408 695 036

Persons wishing to purchase any firearm that requires a licence from any arms fair in NSW should apply for a Permit to Acquire at least six weeks before the fair. For reasons beyond the control of show organisers, some of the above dates may be changed. It is advisable to check the show dates before travelling.



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International

International Big Game Rifle/ Dangerous Game Shoot

September 12-13, 2020

Location: Mickett Creek Shooting Complex, Darwin, NT **Program:** See National website for full event details. Facilities: Toilets at range but no showers or camping. Darwin Rifle Club has showers and toilets and camping can be arranged with sufficient notice. **Contact:** Barry Seabrook ntbiggamerifle@gmail.com

National

National Junior Rimfire Rifle Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoot

February 1-July 31, 2020

Various locations **Program:** 40-shot match with results due by August 31, 2020. To enter email name, age, club, membership number and detailed results to juniorsports@disciplines.ssaa.org.au. Prizes: Medals for first three in U-15 and O-15 to U-18. **Contact:** juniorsports@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

SSAA Handgun Metallic Silhouette National Postal Shoot

March 1-May 31, 2020

Various locations. **Program:** Big Bore, Small Bore and Field Pistol. Rules: IHMSA official rule book. Prizes: Gift cards - 1 x \$100, 4 x \$50 **Contact:** handgunsilhouette@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

SSAA 5-Stand National Championships

May 16-17, 2020

Location: SSAA Albury, Winchester Lane, Ettamogah, NSW **Program:** See website for event details. **Contact:** Brett Chambellant 0407 153 300

Big Game Rifle National Championships

May 16-17, 2020

Location: Blue Hills Range, Copping, Tas **Program:** See National website for full event details. Nominations to be received

by Friday, May, 1. Rules: SSAA Big Game Rifle national rule book, Issue No.4, 2016. Facilities: Camping and caravans permitted at range from Thursday to Monday, toilets on-site with disabled facilities. **Contact:** David Moults secretary@ssaabluehills.org.au or 0488 441 499

Gallery Rifle National Championships

July 25-26, 2020

Location: SSAA Para, Rifle Range Rd, Greenwith, SA **Program:** See website for full event details. **Contact:** Don Robinson 0428 986 070 or Dave McCarthy 0414 880 333

2020 Combined Services National Championships

October 1-5, 2020

Location: Central Queensland Shooting Complex, Gladstone, Qld **Program:** Please see National website for full event details. **Contact:** ssaagladstonebranch@outlook.com or Greg de Koning 0458 732 993.

SSAA 2020 IMHSA National Championships

October 2-9, 2020

Location: ACT Majura, Hector McIntosh Grove, Majura, ACT **Program:** See National website for full event details **Contact:** Russell Mowles 0418 819 945 or Cheyenne Fischer 0419 660 062.

New South Wales

SSAA (NSW) Benchrest Rimfire Group and IRB State Championships

June 4-8, 2020

Location: SSAA Newcastle Range, Seaham, NSW **Program:** June 4: Practice; 5: Light Rimfire; 6: Heavy Rimfire; 7-8: IRB. Nominations: \$50 a day, juniors half price. Rules and prizes: As per SSAA rule book. Facilities: Clubhouse, toilets, showers, barbecue, camping on range (advise early), dinner available for small fee. **Contact:** Kim Cosstick 0429 335 389 or David Billingham 0418 478 160.

NSW Big Game Rifle State Championships

June 6-7, 2020

Location: Southern Highlands Regional Shooting Complex, NSW **Program:** Please see National website for full event details. Nominations to be received by May 22, 2020. **Contact:** Ben Doherty bfjdoherty@bigpond.com or 0409 831 258

Queensland

SSAA Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

May 15-17, 2020

Location: Hervey Range, Townsville, Qld **Program:** See National website for full event details. **Contact:** Bob Luther johair67@optusnet.com.au or 0429 212 262

SSAA NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette State Championships

May 17-20, 2020

Location: Rifle Range Rd, Hervey Range, Townsville, Qld **Program:** See National website for full event details. **Contact:** Hazel Bozic 4128 0467 hbozic1@bigpond.net.au or Bob Luther 0429 212 262 johair67@optusnet.com.au

Western Australia

SSAA Target Pistol State Championships

May 4-5, 2020

Location: Dawesville, WA **Program:** See National website for full event details. Nominations: \$10 per event, \$50 maximum (juniors half price). Prizes: Medals for first three in each grade for each match. **Contact:** Ronnie Pope 0459 545 374

SSAA Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

May 30-31, 2020

Location: Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA **Program:** See National website for full event details. Nominations: \$20 per day or \$30 all events, juniors half price. Facilities: Some camping with limited power. **Contact:** Paul Dunn Paul@compac.com.au or 0407 428 175

Victoria

SSAA Handgun Metallic Silhouette Ultra 500 State Championships

May 19-21, 2020

Location: Eagle Park, Little River, Victoria **Program:** Tuesday, May 19: Set-up and practice; Wednesday: Competition day one; Thursday: Competition day two, shoot-offs. Rules: IHMSA rule book. **Contact:** Mick Arden 0419 429 485 or Peter Mannu 0410 017 501

SSAA Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 11-12, 2020

Location: Eagle Park Range, Little River, Vic **Program:** See National website for full event details. Nominations: \$60 main match and side events plus Saturday shindig, shooting partner \$50, juniors \$20. Rules: Single Action Shooting Society and local range rules. Facilities: Free camping, toilets and showers, limited power. **Contact:** diablot6@bigpond.com

SSAA IHMS Big Bore State Championships

July 23-26, 2020

Location: Eagle Park, Little River, Vic **Program:** Thursday, July 23: Set-up and practice; Friday: Competition day one; Saturday: Competition day two; Sunday: Competition day three, shoot-offs. Rules: IHMSA rule book. **Contact:** Mick Arden 0419 429 485 or Peter Mannu 0410 017 501

Northern Territory

SSAA (NT) Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

May 9-10, 2020

Location: Alice Springs Shooting Complex, Butler Rd, Alice Springs, NT **Program:** See National website for full event details. Nominations: All events \$10 each, juniors and seniors half price, form on club website at www.ssaalicesprings.wildapricot.org under 'Events'. **Contact:** Russell Wilkie 0408 165 752.

SSAA Official Calendar

INTERNATIONAL

September 12-13, 2020 International Big Game Rifle/Dangerous Game Shoot

Mickett Creek Shooting Complex, Darwin, NT

ntbiggamerifle@gmail.com

NATIONAL

February 1-July 31, 2020 National Junior Rimfire Rifle Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoot

March 1-May 31, 2020 National IHMSA Postal Shoot

April 10-13, 2020 Muzzleloading National Championships

May 16-17, 2020 SSAA 5-Stand National Championships

May 16-17, 2020 Big Game Rifle National Championships

July 25-26, 2020 Gallery Rifle National Championships

October 2-9, 2020 IMHSA 2020 National Championships

October 1-5, 2020 SSAA 2020 Combined Services National Championships

Various locations

Various locations

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, Pinjar, WA

SSAA Albury, Winchester Lane, Ettamogah, NSW

Blue Hills Range, Copping, Tas

Rifle Range Road, Greenwith, SA

SSAA ACT Majura Complex

Gladstone, Queensland

juniorsports@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

handgunsilhouette@disciplines.ssaa.org.au

kevin.brice@bigpond.com

Brett Chambellant 0407 153 300

secretary@ssaabluehills.org.au

0428 986 070 or 0414 880 333

0418 819 945

0458 732 993

STATE

Feb 1-May 31, 2020 SSAA Qld NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette Postal Shoot No.1

April 10-12, 2020 SSAA WA Cowboy Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

April 10-13, 2020 Muzzleloading National Championships

May 4-5, 2020 SSAA (WA) Target Pistol State Championships

May 9-10, 2020 SSAA (NT) Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

May 15-17, 2020 SSAA Qld Lever Action Silhouette State Championships

May 17-20, 2020 SSAA Qld NRA Pistol Metallic Silhouette State Championships

May 19-21, 2020 SSAA Vic IHMS Ultra 500 State Championships

May 30-31, 2020 SSAA (WA) Rifle Metallic Silhouette State Championships

June 4-8, 2020 SSAA (NSW) Benchrest Rimfire Group and IRB State Champs

June 6-7, 2020 NSW Big Game Rifle State Championships

July 11-12, 2020 SSAA Vic Single Action Black Powder State Championships

July 23-26, 2020 SSAA Vic IHMS Big Bore State Championships

Various locations

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, Pinjar, WA

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, Pinjar, WA

Port Bouvard Pistol & Small Bore Rifle Club, WA

Alice Springs Shooting Complex, NT

Hervey Range, Townsville, Qld

Rifle Range Road, Hervey Range, Townsville, Qld

Eagle Park, Little River, Vic

Wanneroo Shooting Complex, WA

SSAA Newcastle Range, Seaham, NSW

Southern Highland Regional Shooting Complex, NSW

Eagle Park Range, Little River, Vic

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SSAA Outdoors Bag

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Chris Crooks, Qld

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Robert Johnstone, Qld

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New season, same old problem

Across the creek a fox was bobbing through the skinny cover of grass, more or less concealed by the feathery seed heads of the phalaris. At any other time it might have gone unnoticed but this morning its every move was being tracked and telegraphed by a wheeling, squalling, dive-bombing squadron of magpies, their clamour exponential to the number of birds involved.

Though I couldn't be sure, I expect friend fox had been busted sneaking up on one or other of the new season fledglings just learning to feed themselves away from the safety of the nest. An alert adult had sounded the alarm and the rest of the family group immediately responded to drive away the danger.

The fox made a half-hearted pass at one of its harassers, clearly annoyed at the attention it was receiving. As the magpie wheeled away, one of its cohorts came in from behind and struck the predator on the back of the head. The fox turned to retaliate and was belted again by a third bird approaching from a different

direction. Outnumbered and under pressure, Reynard seemed to have little choice but to admit defeat and keep moving.

The noisy little drama disappeared behind the head of a tree as I dropped down over the creek bank to repair a broken delivery line on the water pump, a job best done first thing in the morning if you like to avoid snakes as much as I do. As I worked I thought about the season that was unfolding.

By late November the country already had that end of February look about it. There'd been no cattle on the common since mid-winter and with only a few rabbits to trim it, the long grass was

beginning to brown off and fall over. Only the creek bottom remained green, one of the few places where the illusion of life as usual persisted.

Even so, the resident wood ducks had been gone for a month or more, the short green pick they prefer burnt off by the sun except along the very edge of the water. Only black ducks remained, usually as pairs sticking to their favourite water-holes and prepared to defend them against any newcomers that might fly in from elsewhere as the countryside shrivelled

solar powered, electronic snake repellers around the yard, hoping they'd provide some measure of safety for us and our animals. Though I don't have any qualms about removing unwelcome reptiles with a long-handled shovel, I'm always happier when they stay away.

For all of that I knew we were miles better off than many other areas across the country, especially in western parts of NSW. At least we still had running water in the creek - always a plus with the heat of summer and threat of fires on the way.

Job finished, I primed the pump and flicked the switch, pleased when the unit hummed into life as it ought to. Back at the yard gate I looked across to where all the commotion had been earlier. On top of an old dredge mound a fox was sitting on its haunches, soaking up the first of the morning sun.

Here and there, magpies trailed by squalling juveniles were fossicking through the grass for breakfast, their earlier animosity towards the fox seemingly softened by it being out in the open where they could see it.

Dixie cocked her ears and gruffed softly, watching

carefully. The fox stared back, idly scratching an ear itchy with the mange which had already reduced its brush to a skinny rat's tail and would have its body stripped bare and grey long before summer was over. Australia is renowned as a land of drought or plenty and over the past decade or so we've certainly had plenty of drought. What we really need now is plenty of rain. ●



and farm dams began to dry up.

Creek levels were down and consequently there were increased numbers of turtles as the shallower runs retracted. The few carp still in the deeper holes were all quite large, the absence of smaller fish obvious, most of the cormorants that hunted them had also gone and though the occasional pelican was still dropping in for an overnight stay, none of them were hanging around.

Snake numbers were up, mostly in the shape of flattened road kills but there had also been a few down along the creek below the pump. I'd killed two browns at the house and consequently installed





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